



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience with members of the Italian Red Cross

At midday today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Red Cross.

The following is the Holy Father's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you and thank the president for his kind words. They also enabled me to think again of the birth of your Movement, the inspiration that sustains you and the goals you set for yourself. The Red Cross provides an indispensable service throughout Italy and the world, valuable both for the work it carries out in a material sense, and for the spirit with which it does so, which contributes to spreading a new, more open and supportive mentality.

Your activity, then, is even more deserving of the gratitude of every citizen because it takes place in the most diverse situations, coping with fatigue and dangers of various kinds. This is the case of assistance given to the victims of earthquakes and other natural disasters, which alleviates the evidence of the affected populations, representing a sign of the closeness of the whole Italian people. Of equal value are your efforts in the rescue of migrants during their arduous journey on the sea, and in receiving those who disembark and hope to be welcomed and integrated. The hand that you extend to them and which they grasp is an important sign, which should be translated as: "Not only do I help you in this moment, lifting you from the sea and bringing you to safety, but I assure you that I will be there and I will take your destiny to heart". For this reason, your presence alongside immigrants is a prophetic sign, so necessary for our world. I said the word "prophetic sign": the prophet, to say it in a language we all understand – the prophet is one who gives a "slap"; with his way of living, with the service he gives, and in words... a slap, a wake-up call, he gives a real slap to social selfishness, the selfishness of societies. And he reawakens the best that is in the heart! But give a slap with your word and your

witness, not with the hand!

The mission of the volunteer, called to bend down to whoever finds himself in need and to lend him assistance in a loving and disinterested manner, recalls the evangelical figure of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10: 25-37). It is a parable of Jesus whose inexhaustible wealth casts for us a precious light on your work and on the values enshrined in your Statute.

The first of the fundamental principles that the Statute affirms is that of “*humanity*”, to “prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found” (Art 1.3). “Humanity”, by virtue of which you take care of the sufferings of many people, is the same that drives the Good Samaritan to tend to the wounded man lying on the ground. He feels compassion and makes himself his neighbour: without compassion, he would keep himself at a distance, and the man attacked by the brigands would remain for him a faceless subject.

How many there are, even in our world: children, the elderly, women and men whose face is not recognized as unique and unrepeatable, and who remain invisible as they are hidden in the shadow of indifference! This prevents us from seeing the other, from hearing their call and perceiving their suffering. The culture of waste is an anonymous culture, without ties and without faces. It takes care of some only, excluding many others. To affirm the principle of humanity means then to become the promoters of a mentality rooted in the value of every human being, and of a practice that puts not economic interests at the centre of social life, but rather the care of people.

The second principle stated in the Statute is “impartiality”, which leads to making “no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions”. It has as a consequence “neutrality” – the third principle – which means that the Movement does not take sides with any parties in political, racial or religious conflicts and disputes. This criterion of action is in opposition to the trend, today unfortunately so widespread, to distinguish who deserves attention and relief from those who, on the contrary, are not deemed worthy. But you have a policy: this is your policy. And what is your political party? As the president said: you are of the political party of the neediest, of those most in need.

The Samaritan of the Gospel acts impartially: he does not question the man lying on the ground, before helping him, to know what his provenance and faith are, or to understand if he has been wrongly or rightly beaten. No. The Good Samaritan does not subject the wounded man to any prior examination, he does not judge him and does not subordinate his aid to moral prerogatives, let alone religious ones. He simply soothes his wounds and then entrusts him to an inn, first taking care of all his material needs, which can not be postponed. The Samaritan acts, pays himself – just as I like to say that the devil enters through the pocket, so too virtues come out of the pocket: he pays to help the other – and the Samaritan loves. Behind his figure there stands that of Jesus Himself, Who stooped down to humanity and to every one of those He wished to call brothers, without making any distinction, but offering His salvation to every human being.

The Italian Red Cross shares the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality with the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent which, bringing together some 190 national movements, constitutes an international network necessary to coordinate and “globalize” relief efforts, to ensure that it promotes “mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples” (Statutes, 1,3). May these words always be the meaning of your mission: the construction of mutual understanding between people and peoples, and the birth of a lasting peace, which can be based only on a style of cooperation, to be encouraged in every area of human and social life, and on sentiments of friendship. Indeed, those who look at others through the lens of friendship, and not with that of competition or conflict, become the builders of a more liveable and human world.

And I would not like to finish without a thought for those of you who, in performing their aid mission, have lost their life. I am sorry: they have not lost it, no, they have not lost it: they have given it. They are your martyrs, they are your martyrs. And Jesus tells us that there is no greater love than giving your life for others: you have these people among you. May they inspire us, inspire you, help you, and protect you from heaven.

And let us ask that the Spirit of the Risen Christ, Who is the Spirit of love and peace, teach us this way and help us to implement it. I ask God's blessing for all of you for this – God the Father of all of us, the Father of all confessions –and I invoke it in particular for those who have lost their lives through their service, and for their loved ones. I also commend myself to your prayers. Thank you.
