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Press Conference for the presentation of the Holy Father Francis' Message for the Second World Day of the Poor

At 11.00 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Message for the Second World Day of the Poor, instituted by Pope Francis at the end of the Jubilee of Mercy on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, on 18 November this year.

The speakers were H.E. Msgr. Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, and Msgr. Graham Bell, under secretary of the same Pontifical Council.

The following is the intervention by H.E. Msgr. Rino Fisichella.

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Rino Fisichella

In view of the upcoming *Second World Day of the Poor*, which will be held on 18 November 2018, Pope Francis has symbolically signed with the date of 13 June, liturgical memorial of Saint Anthony of Padua, patron of the poor, the *Message* presented today.

The orientation that Pope Francis wished to give this *Day* is clearly expressed by the words of Psalm 37 which have inspired the realization of what is offered to the Church today: "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him". The content of the *Message* is developed around three verbs: to cry, to respond and to free. For each of these three, Pope Francis gives a brief existential summary that provokes reflection.

First of all, one might ask, "how it is that this cry, which rises to the presence of God, is unable to penetrate our ears and leaves us indifferent and impassive?" (2). The Pope responds positively, affirming that, "What we need in order to recognise their voice is silence in which to listen. If we speak too much ourselves, we will be unable to hear them. Often I am afraid that many initiatives, by themselves meritorious and necessary, are intended more to please those who undertake them than to really acknowledge the cry of the poor. If this is the case, when the

cry of the poor rings out our reaction is incoherent and we are unable to empathize with their condition. We are so entrapped in a culture which obliges us to look in the mirror and to pamper ourselves that we believe that a gesture of altruism is sufficient without compromising ourselves directly" (2).

Furthermore, the Pope states that poverty "Poverty is not brought on by itself, but is caused by selfishness, pride, greed and injustice. These are evils as old as man himself, but also sins in which the innocents are caught up, leading to consequences on the social level which are dramatic" (4). Taking as an icon the account of the blind Bartimaeus (cf. *Mk* 10: 46-52), Pope Francis states in the *Message* that many poor people are identified in this poor man at the side of the street, whom many wished to silence. Today too, the Pope remarks, "the poor are reached by voices rebuking them and telling them to shut up and to put up" (5).

For this reason, the Pope's call is strong and direct: "These voices are out of tune, often determined by a phobia of the poor, considered not only as destitute, but also as bearers of insecurity and instability, detached from the habits of daily life and, consequently, to be rejected and kept afar" (5). The response of believers, therefore, needs to be consistent and must be aware that the opposite form of behaviour does not only render us indifferent towards the poor, but paradoxically distances those near to them from God.

Finally, the Pope warns against "a battle for first place" (7) in assisting the poor. He asks Christians first and foremost to understand "how distant our way of living is from that of the world which praises, follows and imitates those who have power and riches, while at the same time marginalizing the poor and considering them a waste and an object of shame" (8). On the contrary, Christ's disciples "are called to honour them, giving them precedence, out of the conviction that they are a real presence of Jesus in our midst" (7). This is a true work of freedom, because it helps create the conditions necessary for respecting the dignity of the weakest.

The Church intends with this *Day* to reiterate the solidarity of the Christian community with those who live on the margins of society due to their condition of poverty. In this way the tradition strongly wished for by Pope Francis in 2016 to have a *World Day* dedicated to the poor takes shape. In full conformity with this teaching, the care of the Holy Father and the Church is intended to be a call to the Christian community to listen, which then transforms into intervention, concrete action, to affirm aloud the rejection of the indifference and impassibility that afflict this historical period more than others. It is an invitation to encounter with the different forms of suffering and marginalization lived by many men and women whom we are accustomed to designating with the term "poor". Faced with this multiform suffering and this cry for help, one finds the first clamorous truth of this *Message*: the Lord listens! The hope of a God Who listens is proclaimed for those who in turn seek the embrace of the Father. No-one, then, may feel excluded from God's love, especially in a world which often elevates wealth to the first objective and makes us closed in on ourselves. The cry of the poor is not therefore in vain. Not only: this relational dimension of cry-listening reminds us that any initiative of aid or assistance must be framed in this perspective of encounter with the other and not instead in the closed circuit of the complacency of consciences. In short, it is a strong provocation to listen to the voice of the poor who cry.

Pope Francis, with the words of the Psalm, finally, offers a message of great hope, introducing an enormously impactful expression: "The Lord, the Psalmist tells us, not only listens to the cry of the poor, but He answers it". The simplicity with which the outcome of is expressed is disarming. The Lord therefore responds! For those who are destitute, this certainty illuminates a night that often seems without end, that never sees the dawn. The *World Day of the Poor* will probably not relieve all the wounds that lacerate the lives of those who live on the margins; and in any case, it is intended to be a sign of hope and a provocation to become living instruments of mercy in the fabric of society, of the community and in personal encounters. "Probably, it is like a drop of water in the desert of poverty; and yet it can be a sign of sharing for those who are in need" (3), yet the awareness of a drop may ignite hope for a refreshing rain. This liberation, then, is the gift that God's outstretched hand offers to the poor, through the faithful and the communities that are tools in His hands.

A day, then, when we celebrate the encounter with the other. It is in this context that some initiatives suggested for all the Church have been imagined, and which will take concrete form also in the Vatican, through the work of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, with the support of some financiers whom I thank.

On Sunday 18 November at 9.30 the Pope will meet with the poor, accompanied by associations and parish groups, together, in Saint Peter's Basilica, where the Holy Eucharist will be celebrated. Pope Francis will then attend the lunch held in the Paul VI Hall with around 3,000 poor people, as a moment of feast and celebration. "It was this experience which enriched the first *World Day of the Poor* in many Dioceses last year. Many people found the warmth of a home, the joy of a celebration meal and the solidarity of those who wished to share the table in a simple and brotherly way" (6). As Pope Francis says in the Message: "I would like that this year and in the future this *World Day* be celebrated in the spirit of joy for the rediscovery of our capacity for getting together. Praying together as a community and sharing a Sunday meal" (6).

Saturday 17, as preparation, a prayer vigil will be held in the Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside-the-Walls, for all the voluntary associations and for those, as true workers of mercy, daily and with discretion offer their service and assistance to those who live in these difficult situations.

After the encouraging results obtained in the previous edition, with almost 600 destitute people who were able to receive free medical treatment, the experience of the health care service will be repeated. During the week from Monday 12 to Sunday 18, a temporary health care centre will be set up in Piazza Pio XII, where from the earliest hours of the morning medical treatments will be offered in various specializations. Dermatology, infectious diseases, cardiology, gynaecology and andrology, ophthalmology, podiatry, and clinical analyses with rapid results will be some of the medical areas covered. So far, the respective specialists from the Vatican Health Department and also the "Gemelli" Catholic University and the University of Tor Vergata have indicated their availability to participate and we are expecting other important participants to join in the coming days.

The appeal is therefore addressed to associations, parishes, and all entities working within the field of assistance to the poor, so that they may further assist those who are in need to make use of this service, overcoming the natural distrust that often characterizes these situations. The Healthcare Service will probably be in function until the late evening.

With this *Message* Pope Francis addresses all the faithful, individually, through parishes and voluntary groups, to once again turn their gaze towards the poor, to listen to their cry, often silent but expressed with an eloquent gaze, and to recognize their needs. The invitation, then, is not to forget that the social poverty to which this *Day* seeks to draw attention is just one of the many forms of poverty that modern man suffers. The poor person to whom the hand is symbolically outstretched, as recalled by the logo for the *World Day of the Poor*, represents the whole of humanity, who in daily experience is aware of needing God's embrace, as well as the attention and solidarity of brothers.
