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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the Members of the "Circolo San Pietro" for the 150th anniversary of its founding

At 11.00 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the "Circolo San Pietro" for the 150th anniversary of its founding, to whom he gave the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear members of the *Circolo San Pietro*,

I am pleased to welcome you and I cordially greet you. I extend my thoughts to your family and to all those who work with you in your various charitable activities. I thank your President, Duke Leopoldo Torlonia, for his kind words. This meeting has a special character, since it takes place on the 150th anniversary of the foundation of your association, which began in 1869 on the initiative of some young Romans. They were animated by the desire to bear witness to concrete support and unconditional fidelity to Pope Pius IX, in a time of misunderstanding between Church and State. This fidelity was manifested through gestures of solidarity to be carried out to assist the poor of Rome; thus the club became the outstretched hand of the Pope towards the most destitute sectors of the population.

Together with you, I praise the Lord for the good that has been accomplished in these 150 years, along with a thought of gratitude towards the members of yesteryear and for those of today. Throughout this long period of its existence, the original objectives, summarized in the three cornerstones: *prayer*, *action*, *sacrifice*, have never been lacking in your Circle. They have been the basis of the wonderful flourishing of activities in the area of charity and acceptance of the least. The apostolic vitality and future of your association will depend on these distinctive characteristics: I encourage you to follow them with renewed enthusiasm. In particular, I would like to encourage your reflection on one of these three fundamental points: *prayer*.

If Jesus is present in the brother we meet, then voluntary activity can become an experience of God and prayer. Do not forget the strength and importance of prayer for you and for all those involved in charitable work: it needs

to be nurtured with appropriate pauses for prayer and listening to the Word of God. The secret of the effectiveness of each of your projects is fidelity to Christ and your personal relationship with Him in prayer. In this way you will be ready to succour those who today live in conditions of hardship or abandonment. Our daily life must indeed be permeated by the presence of Jesus, under Whose gaze we must also place the sufferings of the sick, the loneliness of the elderly, the fears of the poor, and the fragility of the excluded.

In our days too your precious service, articulated in various Commissions, is intended to be an efficacious expression and living testimony of the love that the Church, and the Holy See in particular, reserve for the poor and the suffering. You mostly address the sectors of human poverty in Rome, participating generously in the situations and needs of many brothers and sisters. Continue to pay great attention to new forms of poverty, trying in every situation to give comfort and help to the poorest, without any distinction. Every poor person is worthy of our concern, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or any other condition. Reaching out towards the poor, bringing relief to the sick and suffering, you serve Jesus, Who assured: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (*Mt* 25: 40).

Your praiseworthy institution, although it has been present for a long time in the Roman social fabric, carries within itself evangelical ideals and a vitality that still today make it suited to offering a valid contribution also in the field of hospitality and apostolate of charity. In a time of great changes and persistent economic precariousness, in which the ecclesial community feels called to proclaim the Christian message again and its power of humanization, you must be aware that your work still has an important role to play.

I thank you for all you do and for Peter’s Pence, which as every year you have come to give to me: it is a further sign of openness to people in need. At the same time, it is a concrete participation in the solicitude of the Apostolic See to respond to the growing urgencies of the Church especially in the poorest countries. I wish once again to express my deep appreciation for your commitment, animated by convinced fidelity and following of the Successor of Peter. May the Blessed Virgin accompany and support with your maternal protection your intentions and your good plans.

I ask you to pray for me and for my service to the Church, and I cordially impart to you here present, as well as to those who assist you in your various activities, the Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your families. Thank you.