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Audience with a delegation from Caritas Spain

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, a delegation from Caritas Spain.

The following is his address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome.

It is a great joy for me to receive you as representatives of this ecclesial body that is Caritas Spain, and to do so on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of this institution, an institution which has earned the respect of Spanish society, well beyond its beliefs and ideologies, because Charity, Love with capital letters, is the most essential trait of the human being, created in the image of God, and therefore the language that is closest to us.

I think this is very important, because it allows us to see how the divine way of loving can be a guideline for the work of Caritas. In truth, if Christ calls us to communion with God and with our brothers and sisters, your efforts are aimed precisely at reconquering this unity that is sometimes lost in people and in communities. And it seems to me that this is something you are already proposing, when you identify some challenges in this effort. The first, for example, is the need to "*work on the basis of capacities and potential, accompanying processes*". Indeed, it is not the results that move us, meeting programmed objectives, but putting ourselves in front of that person who is broken, who cannot find his place, welcoming him, opening for him paths of restoration, so that he can find himself able, despite his limitations and ours, to find his place and to open up to others and to God. And maybe you don't see this at the time, but you do at the end. There is a book that came out about two years ago in Spain, a book that takes a couple of hours to read, called "Hermanito". It's the life of a migrant from Central Africa who arrives in Spain - I think it took him two and a half years to get there, or three. It is about everything he had to suffer, and how he was received with charity there, and how he was able to get back on his feet and

recount his experience. I recommend this book to you; it is very short, it is an easy read, and above all it is inspiring.

To open up to others we must face the second proposed challenge "*to take meaningful action*". Gestures that seek to "get by", but which do not promote real change in people, are not enough. In a parish in Spain, the people asked the parish priest if he gave "handouts", that is, if they could take advantage of this "welfare" situation that in reality keeps them chained to the subsidy, preventing their development. The poor must always be received, accompanied and integrated. A full task. But Jesus tells us clearly, by his life and his work, that it is not enough to "give", it is necessary to "give oneself". Charity always presupposes an oblative giving of one's own life. And this will be significant, beyond the concrete action, when it offers the person an open door to a new life. To paraphrase the Gospel of John, if we were sought out and praised just because for people to have bread to eat, and we felt like kings for that reason, we would be betraying Jesus' message. The Lord proposes to us to be the leaven of a kingdom of justice, love and peace. He asks us to be the ones to feed His people with the broken bread that is Himself, teaching us that he who wants to be truly great must become the servant of all.

And the last challenge is linked to the preceding one, aiming "to be a channel for the action of the ecclesial community". The Church, as the mystical body of Christ, extends her action throughout history, and therefore Caritas proposes itself to us as that outstretched hand which is Christ's when we offer it to those who need us, and at the same time allows us to hold on to Christ when He calls upon us in the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Looking at the brother or sister who has fallen let us not forget that the only time in which it is legitimate to look down at a person from above is to help him or her get up again; then never again. Being a channel is not simply a more orderly management of resources, or a space in which to discharge the responsibility of this delicate ecclesial mission. Being a channel should be understood, above all, as that opportunity - which we should all seize - to have that unique and necessary experience to which the Lord invites us when he says: "Do you want to know who your neighbour is? Go and do likewise". Be closer, be closer. A moment ago I spoke about the orderly management of resources. What I am saying now, I do not say because I have information on Caritas Spain. I don't, so I speak freely. Please, pay attention to resources, but do not descend into the category of the great charitable organization, in which forty, fifty, sixty per cent of the resources go to pay the salaries of those who work there. There are companies in Europe, there are, I am sorry, movements of charitable institutions that arrive at sixty per cent; I think it is too much. But forty and above goes to salaries. No. There should be as few mediators as possible. And as far as possible, they should be vocations, rather than jobs. "Come and I'll give you a job at Caritas…". No, no. This will not do. Note that I am not saying this because today I am talking about you; I speak from the experience I have of seeing other aid institutions that fall into this.

Well, God bless you… and may he not take away your good humour, always good humour; it is part of the Holy Spirit. And I ask you not to forget to pray for me, because this job has its minor difficulties [*laughter*]. Thank you.