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Message of the Holy Father Francis to participants in the meeting of Church aid institutions and organizations in Latin America

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the meeting with aid institutions and organizations of the Church in Latin America, taking place in Bogotá, Colombia, from 4 to 8 March 2024:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear Cardinal Roberto Prevost,

President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (CAL),

Dear heads of institutions and Church aid organizations in Latin America,

I am pleased to address you in this meeting with the aid institutions and organizations promoted by this Pontifical Commission. I would like to present my reflection on the theme of *gratuitousness*, which I see reflected in the lines of the programme that His Eminence had the kindness to send me.

When we make an effort, as in the case of the aid destined for the Church in Latin America, it is natural that we expect a result. To not obtain it would be considered a failure, or would at least leave us with the feeling of having worked in vain. But a perception of this kind would be contrary to gratuitousness, which is evangelically defined as giving without expecting anything in return (cf. *Lk 6:35*). How can the two dynamics be reconciled?

To explore this question, perhaps it might be useful to take a step back, focusing on what Jesus asks of us and what the Gospel tells us, trying to ask ourselves, as a journalist would: Who gives? What do they give? Where do they give? How do they give? When do they give? Why do they give? To what end do they give?

In response to the first question – who gives? – the Scripture explains that what we give is none other than what we have received freely (cf. *Mt 10:8*). God is He who gives, and we are merely administrators of the goods received, so we must not boast (cf. *1 Cor 7:4*), nor must we demand a greater reward than our own wages (cf. *1 Tim 5:18*), humbly assuming the responsibility that this gift requires of us (cf. *Mt 25:14-30*).

For the second question – what does the Lord give us? – the answer is simple: He has given us everything. He has given us life, creation, intelligence and the will to be masters of our destiny, the capacity to relate with Him and with our brothers and sisters. Moreover, He has given to us infinite times: making us in His image, capable of loving, giving us proof of His love throughout Salvation History, in the gift of Christ on the cross, in His presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, everything we have is either from God or is a proof and pledge of His love. If we lose this awareness in giving and also in receiving, we distort His essence and our own. Instead of solicitous stewards of God (cf. *Lk 15:42*), we become slaves to money (cf. *Mt 6:24*) and, subjugated by the fear of not having, we give our heart to the treasure of false economic security, administrative efficiency, control, an unstirred life (v. 20).

A turning point in our reflection is seeing where the Lord gives, because it opens the door to a concrete path for us. Since creation, the Lord has always given to us, taking our clay in His hands, our sin, our inconstancy, remaining faithful despite the repeated infidelities of Israel, the disciples, the apostles, with His incarnation, His cross, His sacraments. God gives Himself, in a word, in the midst of His people. Our giving cannot fail to take account of this inescapable truth, which we know to be certain even in our personal and community history. Let us therefore not avoid those who are blind, those who lie on the side of the road, who are overcome with leprosy or misery; rather, let us ask the Lord to be able to see what prevents them from facing their difficulties (cf. *Lk 7:5*).

So, we come to the questions: how and when does the Lord give Himself to His People? It is very simple: always, and totally. God does not set limits: we sin a thousand times, He forgives us a thousand times. He waits in the silent solitude of the Tabernacle for us to return to Him, begging for His love. In holy Communion we do not receive a little piece of Jesus, but all of Jesus, in body and in blood, soul and divinity. God does this, to the point of making Himself small for us, to enrich us through His poverty (cf. *2 Cor 8:9*).

Therefore, we can conclude that gratuitousness is imitating the way in which Jesus gives Himself for us, His people, always and totally, despite our poverty. And why? Out of love. Because, as Pascal would say, love has its reasons that reason does not know, it is “patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (cf. *1 Cor 13:4-7*). Love does not have an agenda, it does not colonize, but it becomes incarnate, it becomes one of us, *mestizo*, to make all things new (cf. *Rev 21.5*).

Therefore, effort is not pointless, because there is a purpose. To give ourselves in this way, imitating Jesus who gave Himself to save us all. To embrace the cross is not a sign of failure, it is not vain work, it is joining in the mission of Jesus to bring “good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (*Lk 4:18*). It is to truly touch the wound of that brother, that community, who has a name, who has an infinite value for God, to bring him light, to strengthen his legs, to cleanse his misery, to offer him the opportunity to respond to the plan of love the Lord has for him, asking on our knees that, arriving there, Jesus might find faith in that land (cf. *Lk 18:8*).

Dear brothers and sisters, I entrust your work to the Holy Virgin; may She guide you as she did with the servants at the wedding at Cana, so that the good wine the Lord promises us may reach everyone. May Jesus bless you. And, please, do not forget to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 26 February 2024