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Audience with members of the “Custodi del Bello” (“Guardians of Beauty”) Project

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the “Guardians of Beauty” Project promoted by the Italian Episcopal Conference.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you. I greet Bishop Giuseppe Baturi, secretary general of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and Bishop Carlo Redaelli, president of *Caritas Italia*. I thank all of you for being here and for what you do for our cities.

Being *Guardians of Beauty* is a great responsibility, besides being an important message for the ecclesial community and for society as a whole. I would therefore like to reflect with you precisely on the name of your project, which is not a simple slogan, but indicates a way of being, a style, a life decision orientated towards two major purposes: *to guard* and *beauty*.

To *safeguard* means to protect, to conserve, to watch over, to defend. It is a multi-form action which requires attention and care, because it sets out from the awareness of the value of whom or what is entrusted to us. It therefore does not permit distraction or idleness. Those who guard keep their eyes wide open, they are not afraid to spend time, to get involved, to take responsibility. And all this, in a context that often invites us not to “get our hands dirty”, to delegate, is prophetic, because it calls for personal and community commitment. Everyone, with his or her own abilities and skills, with intelligence and heart, can do something to look after

things, others, the common home, from a perspective of integral care for creation.

Saint Paul tells us that “creation has been groaning in travail” (*Rom 8:22*); its cry joins that of so many of the earth's poor, who urgently call for serious and effective decisions to promote the good of all, from a perspective that therefore cannot only be *environmental*, but must become *ecological* in a broader, integral sense.

Many people today find themselves at the margins, rejected, forgotten in an increasingly efficiency-based, ruthless society: the poor, migrants, the elderly and the disabled who are alone, the chronically ill. And yet everyone is precious in the eyes of the Lord (cf. *Is 43:1-4*). Therefore I urge you, in your work of requalification of many places left to neglect and degradation, always to keep as your primary objective the care of the people who live in and frequent them. Only in this way can creation be restored to its beauty.

And this is indeed the other value: together with guardianship, *beauty*. Today we talk about it a great deal, to the point of making it an obsession. Often, however, we consider it in a distorted way, confusing it with ephemeral and standardizing aesthetic models, more linked to hedonistic, commercial and advertising criteria than the integral development of people. An approach of this type is deleterious, because it does not help the best in each person to flourish, but rather leads to the degradation of humankind and of nature. If, indeed, “someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 215).

Instead, it is a question of learning to cultivate beauty as something unique and sacred for every creature, conceived, loved and celebrated by God ever since the origins of the world (cf. *Gen 1:4*), as an inseparable unity of grace and goodness, of aesthetic and moral perfection.

This is your mission; and I encourage you, as cooperators in the Creator's great design, not to tire of transforming ugliness into beauty, degradation into opportunity, disorder into harmony.

May Saint Joseph, the humble and silent guardian of the “fairest of the sons of men” (cf. *Ps 45:2*), of the Word incarnate in which all things were created and exist (cf. *Col 1:16-17*), accompany you and be a model for your work. With his discreet and industrious fidelity, Saint Joseph contributed to restoring beauty to the world.

Thank you for the great deal of good you do! I bless you and pray for you. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.
