Bevorder inclusiviteit voor mensen met een handicap

Address to members of the Italian Union of Blind and partially-sighted People

Pope Francis
12 December 2022

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his introductory words, and I am grateful to all of you, who form the Italian Union of Blind and Partially-Sighted People, for coming to share the concerns and projects of this phase of your commitment.

You wanted to do so on the occasion of the liturgical feast of Saint Lucy – which is tomorrow, and tomorrow is also the anniversary of my priestly ordination: I was ordained on Saint Lucy's day – who is the patroness of those affected by disabilities or diseases of sight. I appreciated this choice, because it expresses in a traditional religious sense that belongs to the Italian people, and which is not contrary to the fact that yours is a lay, non-denominational association.

Lucy, a martyr from Syracuse, reminds us by her example that the highest dignity of the human being consists of bearing witness to the truth, following one's own conscience at all costs, without duality and without compromise. This means staying on the side of the light, serving the light, as her very name "Lucy", "she of the light", evokes. Being clear, transparent people, being sincere, communicating with others in an open, clear, respectful way. In this way one contributes to spreading light in the environments where one lives, making them more humane, more liveable.

Starting from this cue we take from the figure of Saint Lucy, I would like to confide to you how I look at you, at your association: I see you as a constructive force in society, in particular in Italian society, which is going through a difficult time. This perspective may see strange, because we usually associate with disability the idea of need, assistance and at times – thank God, less and less – a certain pietism. No, the Pope does not look at you in this way; the Church does not look at you like that. The Christian point of view on disability is no longer, and must never be pietism or mere assistentialism, but rather the awareness that fragility, assumed with responsibility and solidarity, is a resource for the social body as a whole and for the ecclesial community.

Blind and partially-sighted people, well-formed in ethical principles and in civic consciousness, are on the first line for building inclusive communities, where each person can participate without being ashamed of his or her own limits and frailties, cooperating with others to complement and support each other. And we all need each other, not only people with problems of physical frailty; we all need the help of others to go forward in life, because we are all weak at heart, all of us. Yours is an association that has just surpassed one hundred years; it is a reality that by now belongs to national history: protecting the rights of people with sight disabilities, you have cooperated in the civil growth of the country. I encourage you to go forward with an ever more constructive, proactive style, as a force that conveys confidence and hope.

Italian society needs hope, and this comes above all from the witness of people who, in their condition of fragility, do not close themselves away, do not weep over themselves, but engage together with others to improve things.

Indeed, Saint Lucy is described in precisely this way: as a young and defenceless woman who nevertheless does not give in to threats and flattery, but on the contrary responds with courage and stands up to the judge who interrogates her. With the protection and example of Lucy, go forward!

I bless you and all the members of your association from my heart. I wish a happy Christmas to you and your loved ones! And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!