



The Holy See

**LUNCHEON OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
WITH THE POOR AND VOLUNTEERS
OF THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO IN TRASTEVERE (ROME)**

*Via Dandolo, Rome
Sunday, 27 December 2009*

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER AFTER THE MEAL

FINAL GREETING

Dear Friends,

It is a moving experience for me to be with you, to be here in the family of the Community of Sant'Egidio, to be with Jesus' friends, because Jesus especially loves people who are suffering, people in difficulty, and wants them to become his brothers and sisters. Thank you for this possibility! I am very glad and I thank all those who prepared the meal, lovingly and competently I was truly aware of the good cooking, congratulations! and I also thank those who served the food so quickly that in an hour we had finished a large lunch! Thank you and well done! I address my cordial thoughts to the Vicegerent, Archbishop Luigi Moretti, and to Bishop Vincenzo Paglia of Terni-Narni-Amelia. I greet with affection Prof. Andrea Riccardi, Founder of the Community a longstanding friend, as are Bishop Paglia and Bishop Spreafico and I thank him for his courteous and profound words. Together with Prof. Riccardi, I also greet the President, Prof. Marco Impagliazzo, and the chaplain, Mons. Matteo Zuppi, parish priest of Santa Maria in Trastevere. Lastly, I address a special thought to all the friends of Sant'Egidio and to each one of you here. At lunch I was able to learn a little of some of your histories that reflect current human situations. I heard of sorrowful events full of humanity and also stories of love rediscovered here at Sant'Egidio: the experiences of elderly, homeless or disabled people, emigrants, gypsies, individuals with financial problems or other difficulties who are all, in one way or another, sorely

tried by life. I am here with you to tell you that I am close to you and love you, and that you and your affairs are not far from my thoughts but rather at the centre and in the heart of the Community of believers, hence also in my heart.

Through the loving actions of those who follow Jesus the truth becomes visible: that "(God) has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 17). Jesus said: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25: 35-36). And he concludes: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (v. 40). Listening to these words, how is it possible not to feel truly friends of those in whom one recognizes the Lord? And not only friends but also relatives. I have come to you precisely on the Feast of the Holy Family because, in a certain way, you resemble it. In fact, the Family of Jesus, from his very first steps, encountered difficulties: it experienced the hardship of finding no hospitality and was forced by King Herod's violence to emigrate to Egypt. You know well what difficulty means, but here you have someone who loves and helps you, indeed, some of you have found your family thanks to the caring service of the Community of Sant'Egidio which offers a sign of God's love for the poor.

What happens at home is taking place here today: those who serve and help mingle with those who are helped and served and those in greatest need are given priority. The words of the Psalm spring to mind: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps 133 [132]: 1). The commitment to making those who are lonely or in need feel at home, so laudably practised by the Community of Sant'Egidio, is born from attentive listening to the Word of God and from prayer.

I would like to encourage everyone to persevere on this journey of faith. With the words of St John Chrysostom I would like to remind each one: "Consider you have become a priest of Christ, giving with your own hand not flesh but bread, and not Blood, but a cup of water" (*Homily on the Gospel of Matthew*, 42,3). What riches are offered to life by God's love expressed in real service to our brothers and sisters who are in need! Like St Lawrence, a Deacon of the Church of Rome, when the Roman magistrates of the time sought to intimidate him, to make him handover the Church's treasure, he pointed to the poor of Rome as the true treasure of the Church. We can make St Lawrence's gesture our own and say that you poor people really are the Church's treasure.

Loving and serving give the joy of the Lord who says to us: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). In this time of particular financial difficulty may each person be a sign of hope and a witness of a new world for those who, locked into their own egoism and deluded into thinking they can be happy alone, live in sadness or in transient joy that leaves the heart empty.

A few days have passed since *Holy Christmas*: God made himself a Child, he made himself close to us to tell us that he loves us and needs our love. With affection, I wish everyone happy feast days and the joy of feeling God's love ever more deeply. I invoke upon you the protection of the

Virgin of the Visitation, the one who teaches us to go "in haste" to meet the needs of the brethren, and I bless you all with affection.

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Before leaving the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Holy Father spoke to the faithful gathered outside:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After taking part in the festive meal at the Soup Kitchen of the Sant'Egidio Community and greeting several students from the Community's school of language and culture, I address my warmest good wishes to you who, unable to enter, took part in this meeting outside the building. They tell me you have been here for an hour or two already. Thank you!

So many people from different countries, marked by need, meet here to seek a word, help and enlightenment for a better future. Strive, therefore, to ensure that no one is lonely, no one marginalized, no one forsaken.

There is one language that unites all things, over and above the different tongues: the language of love. As the Apostle Paul says: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13: 1). It is also the language of this school, which we must learn and practise ever more often. It is taught by the Child Jesus, God, who out of love made himself one of us and speaks first of all with his presence, with his humility as a Child who makes himself dependent on our love. It is this language that will improve our cities and the world.

I bless each one of you with affection and gratitude for all that you do for the poor with a view to building the civilization of love. I thank you all. Happy feast days and a Happy New Year!

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