



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN FEDERATION OF DEAF ASSOCIATIONS (FIAS)

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 25 April 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I greet all of you warmly and in a special way you the deaf and your relatives and friends present here. I thank the President for the words with which she introduced our encounter.

For a number of years, by promoting greater inclusion in all fields, your Federation has been bringing together associations dedicated to addressing the throw-away culture in Italy. Such work is necessary to ensure a better quality of life for the deaf and to overcome this disability by enhancing all dimensions, including the spiritual, in an integral understanding of mankind.

The deaf inevitably experience a condition of vulnerability and this is a part of life and can be accepted in a positive way. What is not good however, is that, like other differently abled people and their families, they often experience situations of prejudice, at times even within Christian communities, as also mentioned by the President. Cities, nations and parishes, with their respective services, are called to increasingly overcome the barriers that do not allow the potential of your presence to be tapped, by going beyond your impairment. Instead, you teach us that only by experiencing limitations and vulnerability can one become a builder — together with the leaders and all members of civil and ecclesial communities — of the culture of encounter, in contrast to the widespread indifference. In this way, society and the community can improve and also offer deaf persons an existential fulfillment that takes into account all aspects of life in its different phases.

More than ever in today's cultural and social context you, the deaf, are a gift to the Church: "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in

the faith, are agents of evangelization” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). Therefore, the presence of deaf persons among pastoral care workers, naturally trained according to their inclinations and abilities, can also truly represent a resource and an opportunity for evangelization. I fervently hope that you too, both as individuals and as associations, can participate ever more fully in the lives of your ecclesial communities. You will thus be able to rediscover and bring to fruition the talents that the Lord has given you, to the benefit of families and all the People of God.

God’s presence is perceived not with our ears but with faith. Therefore, I encourage you to rekindle your faith to feel ever increasingly the closeness of God whose voice resonates in the heart of each of us and that everyone can hear. In this way you will be able to help those who do not “hear” God’s voice to be more attentive to it. This is a significant contribution that the deaf can make to the vitality of the Church.

I think of the many deaf people in Italy and throughout the world, especially those living in conditions of marginalization and misery. I pray for them. And I pray for you, that you may bring your particular contribution to society, being able to have a prophetic gaze, being able to accompany processes of sharing and inclusion, being able to cooperate in the revolution of tenderness and closeness. In the Church too, your presence is a necessary contribution to building communities that are welcoming and open to all, beginning with the least.

Thank you for your much appreciated visit. I encourage you to joyfully continue your journey and, as I ask you to please pray for me, I offer you my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.