



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE SANT'EGIDIO COMMUNITY

Basilica of "Santa Maria in Trastevere"
Sunday, 15 June 2014

[Video](#)

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Dear Friends,

I've come to visit the Community of Sant'Egidio here in Trastevere, where it was founded. Thank you for your warm welcome!

We are gathered here near Christ, who, from above in the mosaic, watches us with deep and tender eyes, together with the Virgin Mary, whose arm encircles him. This ancient basilica has become a place of daily prayer for many Romans and pilgrims. To pray in the centre of the city doesn't mean to forget the human and urban peripheries. It means to listen and receive the Gospel of love to go forth and encounter the brothers and sisters on the fringes of the city and the world!

Every church, every community is called to this in their life that is frenzied and at times confused by the city. Everything begins with *prayer*. Prayer safeguards the anonymous person in the city from temptations that can also be our own: the belief that everything revolves around us, indifference, paranoia. Prayer is the first job of your Community, and it consists in listening to the Word of God — this bread, the bread that gives us strength, that lets us go forward — but also in turning our eyes to him, like in this basilica: "Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed", says the Psalm (34:5).

He who sees the Lord, sees others. You have also learned to see others, particularly *the poor*, and

I hope you live what Professor Riccardi said, that you don't distinguish between who is helping and who is being helped. The tension slowly ceases being tension and becomes an encounter, an embrace: it becomes unclear who helps and who is being helped. Who leads the action? Both of them, or, to say it better, the embrace leads.

Jesus is present in the poor, he identifies with them. St John Chrysostom writes: "Thy Lord cometh unto thee in need..." (*In Matthaëum Homil. IXVI, 3: PG 58, 629*). You are and continue to be a Community with poor people. I see among you many elderly as well. I am pleased that you are their friends and neighbours. The care given to the elderly, like that of children, is an indicator of the quality of a community. When the elderly are tossed aside, when the elderly are isolated and sometimes fade away due to a lack of care, it's an awful sign! How nice instead is that alliance between young and old that I see here, where everyone gives and receives! The elderly and their prayers are a treasure for Sant'Egidio. A people who don't protect their elderly, who don't take care of their young, is a people without a future, a people without hope. Because the young — the children, the youth — and the old carry history forward. The children, the young rightly have their biological strength. The elderly offer their memory. But when a community loses its memory, it's over, it's over. It's awful to see a community, a people, a culture that's lost its memory. The 90-year-old grandma who spoke — brava! — she told us that there was this tendency to toss aside, this throw-away culture. To maintain a balance like this, where at the centre of the world economy there are no men and women, but where money is an idol, it's necessary to throw things away. Children are thrown-away, no children. Let us consider only the birth rate in Europe: in Italy, Spain, France... And we throw away the elderly, behind which are attitudes of hidden euthanasia, a form of euthanasia. They aren't needed, and what isn't needed gets thrown away. What doesn't produce is discarded. And today the crisis is so great that the young are tossed aside: when we consider that these 75 million young people aged 25 and below, who are "neither-nors": neither working nor studying. They are without. It happens today in this tired Europe, as she said. In this Europe that has had enough; she isn't old, no, she's tired. She doesn't know what to do. A friend of mine asked me a question, some time ago: why don't I talk about Europe? I tricked him, I said: "Did you hear when I spoke about Asia?", and he realized it was a trick question! Today I'm speaking about Europe. Europe is tired. We have to help her rejuvenate, to find her roots. It's true: Europe has disowned her roots. It's true. But we have to help her find them again.

Changes in society begin with the poor and the elderly. As Jesus said: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Mt 21:42). Likewise, the poor are in some ways this "cornerstone" for building a community. Today, unfortunately, the speculative economy makes the poor ever poorer, depriving them of the essentials, such as housing and employment. This is unacceptable! Those who live solidarity don't accept it and they take action. And this word, "solidarity", many people want to eliminate it from the dictionary, because some cultures see it as a bad word. No! Solidarity is a Christian word! And this is why you are the family of the homeless, friends of disabled persons, who — when loved — express great humanity. I also see here many "new Europeans", immigrants who arrived after agonizing and dangerous journeys. The

Community welcomes them attentively and demonstrates that a foreigner is one of our brothers to recognize and to help. And this rejuvenates us.

From here, from Santa Maria in Trastevere, I send my greeting to all those who participate in your community in other Countries of the world. I encourage them as well to be friends of God, of the poor and of peace: those who live this way will be blessed in life and will be a blessing for others.

In some Countries suffering from war, you seek to keep hope for *peace* alive. Working for peace doesn't bring quick results, but it is the work of patient artisans who seek that which unites and set aside that which divides, as [Saint John XXIII](#) said.

More prayer and more dialogue are needed: they're necessary. The world suffocates without dialogue. Dialogue is only possible starting from true identity. I cannot pretend to have a different identity in order to dialogue. No, it isn't possible to dialogue in this way. This is my identity and I dialogue because I'm a person, because I'm a man or a woman; and man and woman have the opportunity to dialogue without negotiating their identity. The world suffocates without dialogue: for this you also make your contribution, in order to promote friendship among religions.

Go forth on this path: *prayer, the poor and peace*. And as you walk this path, you help compassion grow in the heart of society — which is the true revolution, that of compassion and tenderness — to cultivate friendship in place of the ghosts of animosity and indifference.

May the Lord Jesus, who from high in the mosaic embraces his Most Holy Mother, sustain you everywhere and, together with her, embrace all of you in his mercy. We need this, we really need it. This is the time for mercy. I pray for you, and you, pray for me! Thank you.