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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with Members of the Apostolic Movement of the Blind**

At 10.00 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Apostolic Movement of the Blind (*Movimento Apostolico Ciechi, MAC*) on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Movement, and the fiftieth of the commencement of its associative activity among peoples. The two anniversaries were celebrated under the auspices of the Days of Sharing 2018, taking place in Frascati, Rome at the John XXIII Centre from 16 to 18 November.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

### **Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

It is a joy to see so many of you here, ninety years after the birth of your association. Maria Motta, a blind but very courageous woman, was born in Argentina in the beautiful city of Rosario. When she returned to Italy with her parents she devoted herself with human and Christian passion to teaching, but it was not enough for her: in 1928, she initiated a spiritual community among the blind – already active in France – based on the model of the Prayer Apostolate. From this tiny seed there developed an association which has spread throughout all of Italy and was approved by Pope Saint John XXIII.

In a prophetic way your founder thought of bringing together the blind people of her time, so that they would be able to meet and support each other. The presence of those able to see, from the earliest years, gradually strengthened the movement, so that it did not turn in on itself and on the problems linked to the lack of sight. Maria Motta wanted to form people who were autonomous and able to bear witness to faith even through their own disabilities. Today all this is evident. You are strongly united, blind and those able to see, sharing a single path of sharing and promoting the person with disabilities, not only because it is provided for by your statutes but above all as a result of that natural Christian friendship that characterizes your journeys of faith.

I reiterate that the best response to offer our society that, at times tends to marginalize people with disabilities, is the “weapon” of love, “not that false saccharine and sanctimonious love, but love which is true, concrete and respectful. To the extent that one is accepted and loved, included in the community and supported in looking to the future with confidence, the true path of life evolves and one experiences enduring happiness” (Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, 21 October 2017).

It is a source of joy for the ecclesial community to know that you, even today, as true missionary disciples of the Gospel, are open to the needs of the poorest and most suffering in the world. Instead of turning in towards yourselves and on the same disability, you courageously responded to Jesus’ invitation: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat [...] I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me” (see *Mt* 25: 35-36). Ever since Pope St. Paul VI published the historical encyclical *Populorum progressio*, the Movement has responded positively, and today you also remember the fifty years of cooperation with the poor countries of the South of the world, where the blind are more numerous and still live in very difficult conditions.

The journey of these ninety years has enabled the Apostolic Movement of the Blind to understand increasingly well the specific charism entrusted to it in the Church, a charism that is composed essentially of two elements. The first is *sharing between the blind and those who see*, as a fruit of a solidarity of reciprocity, with a view to a fruitful path of ecclesial and social inclusion. The second is the *choice of the poor*, a choice that, in various ways and forms, is proper to all the Church. In this way you cooperate to help the growth of a poor Church for the poor, experiencing that they have much to teach us, and that placing them in the centre is a special way of evangelizing. Your concrete commitment to the aid and support of the poor makes you protagonists in the work of evangelization that the Church is carrying out at the pace of the last. All of us, indeed, are “called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, to welcome them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 198).

Especially after Vatican Council II, your Movement has generously opened itself to the task of human promotion both in Italy and in the poorest countries. The first sector of activity that quickly became a reality was that of solidarity with the blind of the poorest countries. It took shape within the association, to the point of involving all your groups and different Italian dioceses. I congratulate you on the work carried out in these fifty years of cooperation with hundreds of missionaries and practitioners in the fields of health, education and social integration. And this missionary work of practical proximity to the poorest brothers has stimulated and increased your attention even to the last and most distant in the national territory, in favour of blind elderly people, blind students, people with multiple disabilities, parents and children who live the problem of blindness. All this helps to spread the culture of acceptance, helping many people and families. Although small in the face of the enormity of the problems of the world, we are strong in the love of God and all “are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 216).

Dear friends, continue your journey with constant confidence, aware of the fact that the future of humanity lies in sharing and friendship above all with the poorest and most abandoned. Thank you for your testimony. And please, remember to pray for me. Thank you.

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