



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS FOR THE 60th INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DEAF

Dear brothers and sisters!

Today I wanted to be with you, but unfortunately it was not possible; therefore I present myself with this message to express my closeness, as I wait for a coming occasion to meet you.

On this occasion of the 60th International Day of the Deaf – the first was celebrated in Rome on 28 September 1958 – I wish first of all to thank the Lord for the testimony of your Association, the National Deaf Association, and of many men and women of good will, that for many years have been committed to fighting exclusion and the culture of waste in order to protect and promote, in every area, the value of the life of every human being and, in particular, the dignity of deaf people.

The story of the E.N.S. is made up of people who believed in unity, solidarity, sharing common goals, in the strength of being a community in a long journey marked with progress, sacrifice and daily battles. A story made by those who did not give up and continued to believe in the self-determination of deaf people. This is a great result if I think of the many deaf people and their family members who, faced with the challenge of disability, no longer feel alone.

In these decades great progress has been made in various fields – scientific, social and cultural – but at the same time the dangerous and unacceptable throwaway culture has also spread, as a consequence of the anthropological crisis that no longer places man at the centre, but instead seeks economic interest, power and unbridled consumption (cf. *Evangeli gaudium*, 52-53). Among the victims of this culture are the most vulnerable people: children who have difficulty participating in school life, the elderly who experience loneliness and abandonment, and young people whose life loses its meaning and who see themselves robbed of their future and their best dreams.

Thinking of you, I would like to remind you that being and forming an association is in itself a value. You are not a sum of people, but you have joined together in order to live and transmit the will to accompany and support those who, like you, are in difficulty but are first and foremost

bearers of a priceless human wealth. Today there is a great need to live with joy and commitment the associative dimension: being united and united, meeting, sharing experiences, successes and failures, pooling resources, all of this contributes to increasing the human, social and cultural heritage of a people. Associations like yours - thank God in Italy there are not just a few - encourage everyone to form a community, indeed, to be a community, to welcome each other with our limits and our efforts, but also with our joys and our smiles. Because we all have capacities and limits!

We are called together to go against the current, struggling most of all so that the right of every man and every woman to a dignified life always be protected. It is not just a matter of satisfying certain needs, but rather of recognizing one's desire to be welcomed and to be able to live independently. The challenge is for inclusion to become a mentality and a culture, and for consistent and concrete support for this cause not to be lacking among legislators and leaders. The rights to be guaranteed should include those of study, work, a home, and accessibility in communication. For this reason, while the dutiful fight against architectural barriers is being pursued with tenacity, efforts must be made to break down all the barriers that prevent the possibility of relationship and meeting in autonomy and of reaching an authentic culture and practice of inclusion. This applies both to civil society and the ecclesial community.

Many of you have reached your social and professional position, even at a high level, with great difficulty because of your deafness, and this is a great human and civil conquest. But how happy I am when I see that you, as well as other people with disabilities, by virtue of your Baptism achieve these goals within the Church too, especially in the field of evangelization! This becomes an example and stimulus for Christian communities in their daily lives.

I hope that in every diocese you, as deaf people, together with the pastoral agents prepared in sign language, lip-reading and subtitling, cooperate so that deaf people may be fully integrated into the Christian community and that their sense of belonging may grow. This requires inclusive pastoral care in parishes, associations and schools.

The first place of inclusion is, however, as always, the family. Therefore, in this case too, families with deaf people are protagonists of the renewal of mentality and lifestyle. This applies to them in their roles both as recipients of the services they rightfully claim from the competent institutions; and as subjects of promotional action in the civil, social and ecclesial sphere.

Dear friends, much has been done, thanks also to you, to increase acceptance, inclusion, encounter and solidarity. But much remains to be done for the promotion of deaf people, overcoming the isolation of many families and redeeming those who are still the subject of unacceptable discrimination. May my prayer and my blessing accompany you in this renewed effort. But you too, please, do not forget to pray for me and for the whole Church, so that it may become an increasingly fraternal and hospitable community.

From the Vatican, 28 September 2018

FRANCIS

**Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 28 September 2018*

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