

## **MESSAGE FROM HIS HOLINESS THE POPE FRANCIS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARITIES (AIC)**

In this year 2017, you celebrate the 400 years of the first Brotherhoods of Charity, founded by Saint Vincent of Paul at Chatillon. It is with joy that I unite myself spiritually with you to celebrate this anniversary and I express all my good wishes for this beautiful work to continue its mission of contributing a genuine testimony of God's mercy to the poorest. May this anniversary be for you the occasion to give thanks to God for His gifts and to be open to His surprises, to discern new ways, under the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that your service of charity is ever more fruitful!

The Charities were born of the tenderness and the compassion of the heart of Monsieur Vincent for the poorest, often marginalized and abandoned in the countryside and in the cities. His action for and with them intended to reflect God's goodness for His creatures. He saw the poor as representatives of Jesus Christ, as members of His suffering Body; he realized that the poor, also, were called to build the Church and that in turn they convert us.

Following Vincent de Paul who entrusted the care of his poor to laymen, and more particularly to women, your association wishes to promote the development of less privileged persons and to relieve their poverties, the material, physical, moral and spiritual poverties. And it is in God's Providence that the foundation of this engagement is found. What is Providence if not the love of God that acts in the world and calls for our cooperation? Today I would like to encourage you again to accompany persons in their totality, bringing a particular attention to the precarious conditions of life of numerous women and children. A life of faith, a life united to Christ enables us to perceive the reality of the person, his incomparable dignity, not at first as a limited reality of material goods, of social, economic and political problems but to see him as a being created in the image and likeness of God, as a brother or a sister, as our neighbor for whom we are responsible. To "see" these poverties and to make oneself close, it is not enough to follow great ideas but to live of the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery so dear to Saint Vincent of Paul, mystery of this God who abased Himself by becoming man, who lived among us and died "to raise man and save him." These are not beautiful words, because "it is about the being itself and the action of God." It is the realism that we are called to live as Church. It is why a human promotion, a genuine liberation of man does not exist without the proclamation of the Gospel "because the most sublime aspect of human dignity is found in man's vocation to commune with God."

In the Bull of proclamation for the opening of the Jubilee Year, I expressed the wish that "the years to come be so impregnated with mercy so as to go to the encounter of each one by offering him the goodness and tenderness of God" (n. 5)! I invite you to follow this way. The Church's credibility passes through the merciful love and compassion that open to hope. This credibility passes also through your personal testimony: it is not only about encountering Christ in the poor, but that the poor perceive Christ in you and in your action. Being rooted in the personal experience of Christ, you will also be able to contribute to a "culture of mercy" which renews hearts profoundly and opens to a new reality.

Finally, I would like to invite you to contemplate the charism of Saint Louise de Marillac, to whom Monsieur Vincent entrusted the leadership and coordination of the Charities, and to find in him that fineness and that delicacy of mercy that never wounds and never humiliates anyone but that lifts, gives back courage and hope.

On entrusting you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, as well as to the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Saint Louise de Marillac, I confer upon you the Apostolic Blessing and ask you to pray for me!

From the Vatican, February 22, 2017

**FRANCIS**

[Original text: French] [Translation by Virginia M. Forrester] [Source: <https://zenit.org/articles/popes-message-to-members-of-international-charity-association-aic/>]