

Homily of H. Em. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, at the celebration of the 52nd anniversary of the Community of Sant'Egidio

Cardinals,
Eminences and Excellencies,
Ambassadors,
sisters and brothers all,

we are in this Lateran basilica to celebrate together with the Community of Sant'Egidio who remembers his fifty-two years of life. I cordially greet all of you who have attended, and in particular the founder, Prof. Andrea Riccardi and the President, Prof. Marco Impagliazzo. The presence of many, young and old, Christians of different confessions, authorities and ambassadors of many countries, especially many friends, testifies to the affection and esteem of many and is the most beautiful proof of the gospel work that you carry out.

I bring you the greeting of the Holy Father Pope Francis. As he said in Mozambique when visiting a community center, "continue to bear fruit of solidarity, spirituality and peace".

The Word of God illuminates the road ahead: "Lamp in my footsteps is your Word" - says Psalm 119. Therefore, do not stop returning to the Word of God! It is the red thread that binds your story: listening to the Word every day in the splendid basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, in many places in Rome and the world, also very humble but no less beautiful. This is the spiritual secret of the community. The Word of God grows in those who listen to it - said St. Gregory the Great - and the Community grows by listening to the Word of God.

Two weeks ago we celebrated the Sunday of the Word of God desired by Pope Francis. The proximity of that day with the Community Day shows the entire life of the Community as a "feast of the Word". The Gospel of Matthew, which we have heard, follows the proclamation of the Beatitudes with which Jesus inaugurates the preaching in Galilee. A solemn beginning: almost the manifesto of the Gospel message. Jesus immediately turns to his disciples saying: "You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world". The Beatitudes are not a theoretical and abstract message, but on the contrary it is addressed to concrete people. It is difficult to imagine that the disciples were already "men of the beatitudes". Yet Jesus says that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He insists on this: "If even salt loses its flavor, what will it be salty with?". If your life is tasteless, the whole pasta will be tasteless; if you put your lamp under the bucket, everyone will remain in the dark. Even poor men and poor women can be light of the world and salt of the earth!

Indeed, precisely because fragile and poor can be! These words of Jesus also seem suitable for the Community of Sant'Egidio: Jesus wanted it to be salt and light from the beginning and from Rome. Since its first steps, in fact, while the society was

traversed by strong tensions of change, the Community of Sant'Egidio has not alienated or opposed, but has chosen evangelically, to bring the Gospel into the lives of the people of that generation, so as to be salt and light of the earth. Very young, you went to the outskirts of the city and lived in them with love. The relationship between Rome and Sant'Egidio is close: an alliance that unites and enriches both.

This city has the mission of *communis patria*. Rome, in fact, means universality, fraternity, openness to the other, in short, peace. In Rome nobody is a foreigner. Saint Egidio feels that the world must be a common home: a "universal homeland" for all peoples. It can also be seen in the reception and integration of refugees, emigrants, those who reach Italy through humanitarian corridors.

Saint John Paul II had sensed this and said: "where the other Communities of Sant'Egidio are - even not in Rome - they are always from Rome. This is beautiful: and it touches my heart as the bishop of Rome, who must always think, not only in Rome, but in the whole world ". Sant'Egidio lives this "*romanità*". It is not nationalism or closure, which are, in the end, childish reactions to the great global world, which seems invasive. True "*romanità*" is universality. Only in the name of universality can Rome truly be reborn. Universality is to live for others, to integrate others, but also to feel the bond with the peoples of the world, European, Mediterranean as well as those far away, with which the catholicity of the Church unites us.

The community did not stop in Rome, according to the Gospel word: "a city that is on a mountain cannot be hidden, nor does a lamp light up to put it under a bushel, but on the candlestick, and thus sheds light on all those who live in the house. " You have looked towards new horizons and traced new roads on the outskirts of many cities in the world, all in need of salt and light. Every city, even the richest, needs all of this.

Over the years, many of us have accompanied, followed and appreciated you. You have been reason for hope and stimulation. I do not want to talk about what you are doing, but to indicate the soul of everything, to which you are called to always remain faithful: and this soul is charity which starts from the poor, from those who have been rejected and constitute the new corner stone. During his apostolic trip to Mozambique, Pope Francis wanted to visit the DREAM center in Zimpeto in Maputo for the treatment of AIDS patients and was deeply affected by it. I was also present, and I was able to see your precious work for the lives of children and women.

Furthermore, I cannot keep silent about the various initiatives of peace and dialogue that the Community animates and facilitates. The latest is the agreement for the opening of dialogue in South Sudan. Yes, peace is the salt to be spread in many countries of the world. Salt preserves. Peace preserves life. I wish Sant'Egidio to continue to spread the salt of peace, so that peace will not be disturbed, but grow!

In many parts of the world, we see selfishness growing, nationalisms rising, divisions and walls multiplying, violence spreading, while too many hatreds flow in the veins of society. It seems that sometimes peaceful and democratic coexistence is at risk. We

cannot look resigned. Our answer is not the opposition. Our answer is to make the light of "good works" shine even more, which change, transform solitude into communion, conflict in peace, resignation in hope of a new future. Multiply your generous creativity of good, because good is needed, much needed, here and in the whole world.

Jesus says: "So let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven". Salt and light are Jesus. He is and must be the substance of the charisma of Sant 'Egidio. Aware of our weakness, we drink from him, the source of life and faith. And, without being satisfied with our good results, we communicate the Gospel even further and to those who do not know it. We live in a time in which the testimony of Christians is urgently needed, here in Rome, in Italy, in Europe and in the world.

Pope Francis stands before us. We cannot and do not want him to be alone. This means communicating the Gospel and doing good, as he does. We cling to him. Sant'Egidio is at ease in the furrow that the Pope traces. Keep going through the places of pain and the suburbs!

Pope Francis insists that Christians rise from a reassuring laziness, even religious, and go out to meet everyone: no one should be left alone, without mercy. The world, the cities, will be renewed by Christian communities - no matter whether small or large - which are salt and light. And we, tonight, thank the Lord for the gift of the Community of Sant'Egidio. We ask the Lord to bless all his members and friends, protect them and guide them so that they continue to be salt of the earth and light of the world. And so be it.