Visit to the “Il Chicco” Community

13/05/2016

Arca - community il Chicco

Via Ancona 1 - Ciampino (Roma) - Italia

Today, May 13, at 5 p.m., Pope Francis visited the community “Il Chicco” as part of the Jubilee initiative “Fridays of Mercy”. “Il Chicco” is an association that belongs to the family of *L’Arche* founded by Jean Vanier in 1964. *L’Arche* is present in more than 30 countries in five continents and, together with the association “Faith and Light” is dedicated to the most weak and marginalized members of society. The community of “Il Chicco” (the Grain), founded in 1981, was the first in Italy. Today it is home to 18 people with grave mental disabilities. A second foundation has been made in Bologna, and a third should soon open in Sardegna. The idea behind these “family houses” is to take care of people with serious disabilities in a way that makes them feel welcomed and gives them a role in their own lives and in the lives of those dedicated to their care. The fundamental idea embraced by *L’Arche* is the “praise of imperfection”; namely to become aware that no one can be discriminated against because of any type of disability. Visiting these houses permits one to discover how much these people possess their own particular sensitivity, developed from profound affection and a search for friendship.

Pope Francis wanted to give a further sign against the prevailing “throw away culture”. You cannot be deprived of love, joy, and dignity merely because you have an intellectual disability. No one can permit permit himself or herself to discriminate on the basis of preconceptions that emarginate families and associations and shut them in solitude. In the building at Ciampino, there are two family houses (called “focolari”): the “Vigna” (Vineyard) and the “Ulivo” (olive tree). Pope Francis sat down at the table to have a snack with the disabled and the volunteers; he listened to the simple words of Nadia, Salvatore, Vittorio, Paolo, Maria Grazia, Danilo… sharing this familiar moment with joy

and simplicity. He was also able to visit those with more serious disabilities and bestow gestures of profound affection and tenderness on them; in particularly to Armando and Fabio who were the first to be welcomed here.

According to the inspiration of the founder of *L'Arche,* the disabled should also carry out some type of manual work, according to their capacities. So Pope Francis visited their workshop where they daily produce small handmade objects that espress the creativity and imagination of the residents of "Chicco". Finally, with everyone holding hands, Pope Fancis prayed together with them in their small chapel. After having hugged everyone, he left around 6:30 p.m. The "Chicco" community survives on small regional assistance grants, and relies on Divine Providence for the major portion of its needs. The Pope, in addition to a sum of money, as a personal contribution also brought pastries, seasonal fruits, cherries and peaches, which were received by everyone with great applause and joy.

With this visit, Pope Francis expressed one of the characteristic messages of his pontificate: attention to those who are simplest and weakest. By bringing them tenderness and affection he wanted to give a concrete sign of how to live out the Year of Mercy. As of May 13, the official statistics for the Holy Year indicate that more than 7 million (7.133.256) people have been present for Jubilee events in Rome. Today's visit was the fifth gesture of mercy carried out by Pope Francis in the course of the Jubilee Year: in *January,* he visited a nursing home for the elderly and those in a vegetative state; in *February,* a community for the treatment of drug addictions at Castelgandolfo; in *March,* a center that welcomes refugees (Cara) at Castelnuovo di Porto; and in *April*, the Island of Lesbo.