



For people with disabilities

DECEMBER

“Let us pray that people with disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusion programmes that value their active participation”



PRAYER INTENTION REFLECTION

MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES¹⁵

Francis

3 December 2020

1. The threat of the throwaway culture

In the first place, the “rain”, the “rivers” and the “winds” that threaten the house can be identified with the throwaway culture widespread in our time (cf. [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 53). For that culture, “some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled” ([Fratelli Tutti](#), 18).

That culture affects especially the most vulnerable, among whom are the persons with disabilities. In the last fifty years, important steps forward have been taken on both the civil and ecclesial levels. Awareness of the dignity of each person has grown, and this has resulted in courageous decisions to promote the inclusion of those experiencing physical and psychological limitations. Yet, on the cultural level, much still stands in the way of this trend. We see it in attitudes of rejection, due also to a narcissistic and utilitarian mentality, that give rise to marginalization that ignores the inevitable fact that *frailty is part of everyone's life*. Indeed, some with even severe disabilities, despite great challenges, have found the way to a beautiful and meaningful life, whereas many “able-bodied” people feel dissatisfied or even desperate. “Vulnerability is intrinsic to the essential nature of humanity” ([Address to the Conference “Catechesis and People with Disabilities”](#), 21 October 2017).

¹⁵ See full message:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201203_messaggio-disabilita.html

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Consequently, it is important, on this Day, to promote a *culture of life* that constantly affirms the dignity of every person and works especially to defend men and women with disabilities, of all ages and social conditions.

2. The "rock" of inclusion

The present pandemic has further highlighted the disparities and inequalities widespread in our time, particularly to the detriment of the most vulnerable. "The virus, while it does not distinguish between people, has found, in its devastating path, great inequalities and discrimination. And it has only made them worse" ([Catechesis at the General Audience of 19 August 2020](#)).

For this reason, *inclusion* should be the first "rock" on which to build our house. Although this term is at times overused, the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan (*Lk* 10:25-37) continues to be timely. Along the road of life, we often come across wounded people, and these can include persons with disabilities and particular needs. "The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders" ([Fratelli Tutti](#), 69).

Inclusion should be the "rock" on which to build programmes and initiatives of civil institutions meant to ensure that no one, especially those in greatest difficulty, is left behind. The strength of a chain depends upon the attention paid to its weakest links.

As for ecclesial institutions, I reiterate the need to make available *suitable and accessible means* for handing on the faith. I also hope that these can be made available to those who need them, cost-free to the extent possible, also through the new technologies that have proven so important for everyone in the midst of this pandemic. I also encourage efforts to provide all priests, seminarians, religious, catechists and pastoral workers with *regular training* concerning disabilities and the use of inclusive pastoral tools. Parish communities should be concerned to encourage among the faithful a welcoming attitude towards people with disabilities. Creating a fully accessible parish requires not only the removal of architectural barriers, but above all, helping parishioners to develop attitudes and acts of solidarity and service towards persons with disabilities and their families. Our aim should be to speak no longer about "them", but rather about "us".

➤ 3 December 2022 – International Day of Persons with Disabilities