



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL FROM THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY
AND THE ITALIAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 20 December 2013*

*Mr Master of Ceremonies,
Mr Ambassador,
Distinguishes Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I cordially greet you and I thank you for your visit, which the Christmas atmosphere makes all the more pleasant.

First I wish to express my appreciation for all the help which you lend to my ministry by your work, especially the hidden work that goes unnoticed but which is so very valuable. You truly have my heartfelt thanks!

Take last 19 March, for example: it is difficult to imagine all the diplomatic activity that went into that great event. And so today serves as a propitious occasion to thank you, and also to tell you that I am very pleased with what I just heard: regarding your collaboration with the Secretariat of State and with the Prefecture of the Papal Household; and also regarding the ethical and spiritual dimension that you cultivate in all that you do.

Regarding the value and meaning of your work, allow me to emphasize a perspective which I think is very important. Through your service, you are in a position to promote the *culture of encounter*. You are diplomatic officials, and all of your work aims at ensuring that representatives from nations, international organizations and institutions come together in the most profitable way. How important this service is! The more visible, ceremonial aspect of your work is ordered to the unseen, to the growth of positive relations based on mutual understanding, respect and the

common search for paths of development and peace.

Here in particular you have a further card to play: that of the Italian cultural heritage. Throughout the world, Italy has always been synonymous with culture, art, civilization. And you contribute to ensuring that this be esteemed within a culture of encounter, that this heritage contribute to the common good, to what Paul VI called the civilization of love.

Christmas, which is fast approaching, is the celebration of the encounter between God and man. A Child who fully realizes this encounter in his person is given to us. Even those who are not Christians feel summoned by the message of Jesus' Birth. May each one of you be able to experience this mystery of love intensely, and may it also deeply inspire your service.

Above all, may the Lord bestow great peace and serenity upon your families, children, the elderly and those who are sick. I thank you again and I ask you to please pray for me. I wish you a Happy Christmas!