



The Holy See

**GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO A DELEGATION OF THE ARENA FOUNDATION OF VERONA**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 18 January 2024

[Multimedia]

*Your Excellency, distinguished Authorities,
Dear friends, welcome!*

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the celebrations for the centenary of the “rebirth” of the Arena di Verona, initiated in 1913 with the great performance of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida* and has continued until the present day. One hundred seasons of artistic activity of the highest level, which have conserved and kept alive a precious legacy from the past, to hand it down, even richer, to future generations. And this is very beautiful: it is an intelligent, creative and concrete form of gratitude and charity.

The legacy we are talking about is multifaceted. The structure of the Arena itself, first of all, has a twenty-centuries-long history, and has been preserved over time precisely because it has always been a living place. As often happens, it has been adapted to various uses, protagonist of alternating fortunes: valorized, in some periods, in its original function as the backdrop to spectacles; downgraded, in others, to more humble uses, to the point of risking, at times, even being reduced to a stone quarry. However, it has always been redeemed by the affection with which the Veronese have protected its survival, returning to restore it time and again. And so, in the early 1900s it came to host the birthplace of what was to become the beautiful adventure of the *Festival*, now a hundred years old.

How much work in all this, how much dedication and effort: from those who built and rebuilt the structures, the authors and artists, the organizers of the various events, and the very many,

perhaps most of all, who have worked, as they say, “behind the scenes”. Thinking of this, what Saint Paul says to the Church comes to mind, when he compares her to a body with many members; each part is complementary to the others in its specific function (cf. *1 Cor 12:1-27*). One hundred years of art, in fact, cannot be produced by one person alone, nor an elect group; it requires the contribution of a large community, whose work goes beyond the very existence of individuals, and in which those who work know that they are building something not only for themselves, but also for those who will come after. That is why, looking at you, I see with you the even larger crowd of men and women who have gone before you and whom you ideally bring here: a crowd always present, even on stage, at every performance, reminding us how important it is, in art as in life, to be humble and generous. Humility and generosity: two virtues of the true artist that your story tells us about!

I therefore encourage you to continue this work, and to do it with love, not so much for personal success, but rather for the joy of giving something beautiful to others. Giving happiness with art, spreading serenity, communicating harmony! We are all in great need of this. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

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