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Audience with the Italian Association of Catholic Primary School Teachers, the Italian Union of Catholic School Teachers, Managers, Educators and Trainers, and the Association of Catholic School Parents

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Italian Association of Catholic Primary School Teachers, the Italian Union of Catholic School Teachers, Managers, Educators and Trainers, and the Association of Catholic School Parents.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the anniversaries of your Associations: the eightieth of the Italian Association of Catholic Primary School Teachers and of the Italian Union of Catholic School Teachers, Managers, Educators and Trainers, and the fiftieth of the Association of Catholic School Parents. It is a good opportunity to remember, to remember your history and to look to the future. This exercise, this movement between roots, memory and fruits, the results, is the key to commitment in education.

Our meeting takes place in the liturgical season of Christmas, a time that shows us God's pedagogy. And what is His "educational method", God's educational method? It is that of proximity, closeness. God is close, compassionate and tender. The three qualities of God: closeness, compassion and tenderness. Closeness. Proximity. It is the Lord who, as a teacher who enters the world of his pupils, chooses to live among men to teach through the language of life and love. Jesus was born in a condition of poverty and simplicity: this calls us to a pedagogy that values the essential and places humility, gratuitousness and acceptance at the centre. A remote pedagogy, distant from the people, is no use, it does not help. Christmas teaches us that greatness is not manifested in success or wealth, but in love and service to others. God's is a pedagogy of giving, a call to live in communion with Him and with others, as part of a plan of universal fraternity, a plan in which the family

has a central and irreplaceable position. The family. In addition, this pedagogy is an invitation to recognize the dignity of every person, starting from those who are rejected and at the margins, just as the shepherds were treated two thousand years ago, and to appreciate the value of every phase of life, including childhood. The family is at the centre, do not forget. Someone told me that one Sunday he was having lunch in a restaurant, and at a nearby table there was a family: father, mother, son and daughter. All four of them were on their mobile phones, and they did not talk among themselves. This man felt something, and he approached them, saying: "But you are a family, why don't you talk to each other and talk like this, it is strange...". They listened to him, then they sent him packing and carried on doing these things... Please, in the family, one talks! Family is dialogue, it is dialogue that makes us grow.

Today's meeting also takes place at the beginning of the Jubilee journey, which began a few days ago with the celebration of the event by which, with the incarnation of the Son of God, hope entered the world. The Jubilee has a lot to say to the world of education, and also to the world of the school. Indeed, "pilgrims of hope" are all the people who look for a meaning for their life and also those who help the smallest to walk on this path. A good teacher is a man or a woman of hope, because they devote themselves with confidence and patience to a project of human growth. Their hope is not naive, it is rooted in reality, sustained by the conviction that every educational effort has value and that every person has a dignity and every person has a vocation that deserve to be nurtured. It pains me when I see children who are not educated and who go to work, many times exploited, or who go looking for food or things to sell among the rubbish. It is hard. And there are such children!

Hope is the motor that sustains the educator in their daily effort, even in difficulty and failure. But what can we do so as not to lose hope, and to foster it every day? Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, teacher and travelling companion: this allows us truly to be pilgrims of hope. Think of the people you meet at school, children and adults: "Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring" (*Spes non confundit*, 1). These human hopes, through each one of us, can encounter Christian hope, the hope that is born of faith and lives in charity. And let us not forget: hope does not disappoint. Optimism disappoints, but hope does not disappoint. A hope that exceeds every human desire, because it opens minds and hearts to life and eternal beauty.

The school needs this! You are called to develop and transmit a new culture, a new culture, based on the encounter between generations, on inclusion, on the discernment of the true, the good and the beautiful; a culture of responsibility, both personal and collective, to face global challenges such as the environmental, social and economic crises, and the great challenge of peace. At school you can "imagine peace", that is, lay the foundations for a more just and fraternal world, with the contribution of all disciplines and the creativity of children and young people. But if at school you wage war among yourselves, if at school you bully girls and boys who have problems, that is preparing for war, not peace. Please, never bullying, do you understand this? I think not... [reply: 'Yes!'] No bullying! Let us all say it together! Come on! Never bully! I don't understand... [repeat: Never bully!] Be bold and go ahead. Work on this.

Dear sisters and dear brothers, you are here today to celebrate significant anniversaries for your associations, which were founded to offer a contribution to the school, for the best fulfilment of its educational purposes. Ah, I can't remember, what was it you were saying? [They answer: "No bullying!"]. Understood. And not to the school as a container, but to the people who live and work in it: the students, the teachers, the parents, the administrators and all the staff. At the beginning of your history there was the insight that only by associating, walking together, can one improve the school, which by its nature is a community, a community in need of the contribution of everyone. Your founders lived in times when the values of the person and of democratic citizenship needed to be witnessed and strengthened, for the good of all; and also the value of educational freedom. Never forget where you come from, but do not walk with your head facing the other way, mourning times past! This is important. And what mustn't you do, what was it? [They answer: "Never bully!"]. You have learned! Think instead of the *present of the school*, which is the *future of society*, getting to grips with an epoch change. Think of the young teachers who are taking their first steps in school, and of the families who feel alone in their educational task. To each one of them, propose your educational and associative style with humility and freshness; and what was it? [They answer: "No bullying!"] Do not forget this.

I encourage you to do all this together, with a sort of “pact between associations”, because in this way you can better bear witness to the face of the Church *in* the school and *for* the school. Hope never disappoints, never; hope is never still, it is always on the move, and makes us move. So, go forward confidently! I bless you all and those who make up the network of your associations. And do not forget to pray for me, and do not forget to...? [They answer: “Never bully!"]. You have learned! Thank you.
