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Audience with a delegation of the “Consejo Latinoamericano del Centro de Investigación y Formación para la Protección del Menor” (CEPROME)

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of the Latin American Research and Formation Centre for the Protection of Minors (*“Consejo Latinoamericano del Centro de Investigación y Formación para la Protección del Menor”* – CEPROME Latinoamérica), to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

I am happy to receive you on this coincidence that unites you in Rome from various parts of Latin America. It is also curious that this meeting should take place on 25 September, a date on which, according to ancient tradition, the memorial of a martyred child is celebrated in a small shrine in Spain. Regardless of the fact in question, what makes the story interesting is that the tragedy of that child was associated with that of Jesus Himself, and in his representations, he appears dressed like the Lord, both while he walks to Calvary and while he suffers the Passion itself.

This fact, which may seem anecdotal, brought to my mind the Gospel account of the Final Judgement in which we hear the unsettling words of the great King: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*). How the world would change if we were to convince ourselves inwardly that every little one that we meet is a reflection of the face of God! If we were to see in the suffering of each child, each vulnerable person, a line impressed on the veil with which Veronica dried Christ’s face!

I am well aware that you endeavour to work and apply ever more appropriate methods to eradicate the scourge of abuse, both in the Church and in the world. We must not forget: the abuse that has afflicted the Church is but a pale reflection of a sad reality that involves all humanity and to which, above all, the necessary attention is not paid. Some may say: “Ah, there aren’t so many, then”. Even if it were just one, it would be scandalous, just one; and there are more than one.

I think I can say that the Church has made sufficient progress on this path, and will not cease to do so, and this is due to prophetic pastors, a cardinal, who was able to grasp a nettle such as Boston at that time, and go ahead, focusing his care not on the money but on the people and the hurt children. And that is why I want to thank you publicly, Your Eminence, for what you have done. I think I can say that the Church has made a lot of progress in this, and it will not stop doing so. There must also be significant work for society, so that the steps and achievements of the Church in this journey can be an incentive for other institutions to promote this culture of care.

Furthermore, today I would like to propose, starting from this image that identifies each one of the young with Christ Himself, that our effort not be limited to the mere application of protocols, but rather that we entrust them to Jesus in prayer. With humility and truth, we must know how to recognize them among those 'little ones'. And, before the Redeemer, let us also contemplate in that affronted face the suffering we have received and caused, so that we do not feel distant from the people we welcome, but brothers, even in pain. Let us dialogue with Jesus, let us listen to that Word that forgives us, that heals us, that redeems us all. He did not take on the sin of the world to condemn it, but to save it, and He taught us that there is no greater love than that which gives life, that which leaves it in a trace of His Holy Face.

Let us love each other, Jesus tells us, as we love ourselves; that is, aware of our wounds, of our smallness, of our need for forgiveness and consolation. And let us pray, with the confidence that Saint Therese of the Child Jesus teaches us, in these days that precede your festivity, for the unhappiest and most desperate sinners, for their conversion, so that they may see in others the eyes of Jesus who calls out to them.

I do not want to pass without drawing attention to a problem that is very serious in the area of abuse, the filming of child pornography, which unfortunately, by paying a small fee, can already be downloaded to a phone. Where is this child pornography being made? In which country is it being made? Nobody knows. But it is criminality put at the service of everyone through their cellphones. Please, let's talk about this too. Because these children who are filmed are victims, sophisticated victims of this consumer society. Don't forget this point, which worries me a lot.

May God bless you, may Our Lady watch over you, and keep on fighting like this, keep on fighting. Thank you.
