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Audience with a delegation from the Italian Air Force, on the centenary of its institution

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Italian Air Force, on the occasion of the centenary of its institution.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr. Chief of Staff,

Your Excellency, Chaplains,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I cordially welcome you at the end of the first centenary of the foundation of the Italian Air Force. With various initiatives, you have retraced a history that parallels that of the nation and, at the same time, intersects the events of Europe and the world. A history that can be read from different perspectives.

There is the perspective of the scientific progress that has transformed the life of mankind in these hundred years. It has marked, in a special way, the world of "flight", with an extraordinary evolution of means and methods; a progress that, as always, has also presented problems and pitfalls. From very poor aircraft, piloted with fatigue and great difficulty, we have come to sophisticated aerospace engineering systems that allow us to cross the skies, carrying out complex feats and even reaching places in extraterrestrial space. And here it must be reiterated that research, innovation and new technologies must never be subordinated to the interests of power or detrimental uses, but must always be steered towards the integral good of mankind, to the development of all peoples, to greater justice. On this path, yours is and will remain a valuable service to peace.

Then there is the perspective of service, which is also evolving. While in the beginning the presence of the military was necessary mainly in the tragic times of war, today, as with other Armed Forces, the women and men of the Air Force intervene in many other contexts. I am thinking of flight safety and rescue, for which you ensure round-the-clock availability; of cooperation with international organizations for humanitarian and peace-support missions; of the management of serious natural disasters, also assisting less well-equipped countries and poorer populations. I am also thinking of your contribution in health emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, during which you were engaged in keeping hospitals operational, supporting the vaccination campaign and guaranteeing the air transport of sick people. Transport is also necessary in other health emergencies, or in special needs of the nation, such moving citizens in distress abroad, or authorities. It is a commitment that honours you, from which one can understand the depth of your service to the Homeland, extended to the great human family.

And the final perspective is indeed the human one. You defend, welcome, rescue and serve people, supported also by the ministry of Chaplains. Furthermore, you carry out training activities, offering, along with the specialized expertise transmitted in your schools, the legacy of a cultural heritage and values, which enables you to maintain your identity as servants of the State and citizens. Finally, you are men and women marked by great passion, commitment, courage and motivation; ready to pay your tribute of hard work and, at times, of life, as in the case, for example, of the thirteen Italian soldiers killed in Kindu, Congo, during a humanitarian mission under the auspices of the United Nations.

At this time, when humanity is plagued by terrible conflicts, the protection of such human richness is the best guarantee that your commitment is always directed towards the defence of life, justice and peace. For all this I entrust you, your families and your service to the heavenly Patroness, Our Lady of Loreto, whose liturgical memorial falls tomorrow. I bless you from my heart. And please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.
