



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES PARTICIPATING IN THE
UNIFIED FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 13 October 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear friends,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the soccer tournament and of the *forum* promoted by Special Olympics. I greet everyone with affection and I thank the President for the words addressed to me, as well as the young people who spoke. You are the symbol of a sport which opens eyes and hearts to the value and dignity of individuals and people who would otherwise be objects of prejudice and exclusion.

In these days you will have the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of “unified” sports, through which athletes with and without intellectual challenges play together. This beautiful reality, which you bring forth with commitment and conviction, fuels the hope of a positive and fruitful future for sport, because it enables it to become a true occasion of inclusion and participation. Never tire of showing to the world of sports your shared commitment to building a more fraternal society, in which people can grow and develop and fully achieve their own capacities. In this sense, sport is one of the universal languages that overcomes cultural, social, religious and physical differences, and that manages to unite people, making them participants in the same game and, together, protagonists of victory and defeat.

The Church, for her part, does not fail to support and encourage those initiatives, linked to the world of sports, which favour the good of people and of communities. Indeed, sport always has great stories to tell about people who, thanks to it, have emerged from conditions of marginality and poverty, from injuries and misfortunes. These stories show us how the determination and character of a few can be a cause of inspiration and encouragement for so many people, in all aspects of their life.

I hope you may spend these days with joy and serenity. Along with fun, cultivate friendship and solidarity. While I ask you to pray for me, I invoke the Lord's blessing upon you, your families and those who support your sporting activity.

May the Lord bless everyone. May God bless you all.