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Audience with the community of the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome

This morning the Holy Father received in audience, in the Paul VI Hall, the Community of the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome, including 150 children receiving treatment in the centre, accompanied by parents. The meeting was also attended by a group of foreign children, from the “peripheries of the world”, where international cooperation initiatives are active, and 15 children from Bangui in the Central African Republic, with the archbishop of the city, Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga. Hospital staff, collaborators, volunteers, associations and students were also present.

After greetings from the president of the hospital, Mariella Enoc, and interventions by various people linked to Bambino Gesù (a nurse, Valentina; a porter, Dino; a young doctor, Luca; and a former patient, Serena), the Holy Father addressed an impromptu discourse, giving as read the prepared text published below, in which he answers the questions posed by the speakers mentioned above.

“Valentina, your question on children who suffer is great and difficult; I have no answer, and think it is good for this question to remain open. Not even Jesus gave an answer in words. Faced with some cases that occurred then, of innocents who suffered in tragic circumstances, Jesus did not give a sermon or a theoretical discourse. It can certainly be done, but He did not do it. Living in our midst, He did not explain why we suffer, but bearing suffering with love, he showed us for whom He offers Himself. Not why, but for whom. He offered His life for us, and this gift, which cost Him dearly, saved us. And those who follow Jesus do the same: rather than seek out why, they live every day for.

Valentina was demanding and asked also for “medication” for those who are in contact with suffering. It is a good request but I would say just a small thing: one can learn from children. Rediscover every day the value of gratitude, know how to say thank you. We teach this to children and then we do not do it as adults. But saying thank you, simply because we are faced with a person, is a medication against coldness of spirit, which is an ugly and contagious disease. Saying thank you nurtures hope, that hope in which, as St. Paul says, we are saved. Hope is the “gas” of Christian life, which keeps us moving on every day. So it is good to live as grateful people, as children of God, simple and glad, small and joyful.

Indeed you, Dino, spoke of the beauty of small things. It may seem a losing logic, especially nowadays, with the mentality of appearances that demand immediate results, success, visibility. Instead, think of Jesus: the majority

of His life on this earth was spent in hiding; He grew up in his family without haste, spending every day learning, working and sharing their joys and pains. Christmas tells us that God was not made strong and powerful, but fragile and weak as a child.

Dino, while he spoke to us of how to live this smallness, asked however for larger spaces. It is the right question. We live in a time in which spaces and time are increasingly restricted. We are always in haste and find less space; not only parking spaces for our cars, but also places to meet; not only free time, but time to stop and take stock of oneself. There is a great need for more human times and spaces. From what I know, the Bambino Gesù Hospital, throughout its history, developed precisely by responding to many needs that gradually presented themselves; new sites were opened and services relocated to offer new spaces for patients, relatives and researchers. This history must be remembered: it is the best promise for the future! Despite the limited spaces, horizons have been broadened: 'Bambino Gesù' has not focused on its restrictions, but has instead created new spaces and many projects, also far away in other continents. This tells us that the quality of care does not depend only on logistical aspects, but also on the spaces of the heart. It is essential to enlarge the spaces of the heart: then Providence will not fail to take care of concrete spaces too.

You, Luca, instead asked what the 'trademark' of 'Bambino Gesù' should be, aside from professional capacities, which are certainly indispensable. To a young Christian who, like Luca, after studying then starts to look at the world of work – which must be open to the young, not only to the market – I would recommend two ingredients. The first is keeping dreams alive. Dreams must never be anaesthetised: here anaesthetic is forbidden! God Himself, we will hear in Sunday's Gospel, at times communicates through dreams; but above all He invites us to realise grand, if difficult, dreams. He urges us not to stop in doing good, never to extinguish the desire to live great plans. A life without dreams is not worthy of God; a weary and resigned life in which one accepts the day without enthusiasm, is not Christian.

I would add a second ingredient, after dreams: the gift. You, Serena, showed the strength of one who gives. In the end, one may live by pursuing two different aims: placing in first place having, or giving. It is possible to work thinking only of earnings, or by trying to give the best of oneself for the good of others. So work, in spite of all the difficulties, becomes a contribution to the common good, at times even a mission. And we are always at this crossroads: on the one hand, doing something in my own interests, for success and for recognition; on the other, following the intuition of serving, giving, loving. Often the two are mixed, they go together; but it is always important to recognise which comes first. Every morning we can say: now I need to go there, do this job, meet people, face problems; but I want to live this day as the Lord would wish: not as a burden, which then weighs most of all on the others who have to put up with me, but as a gift. It is my turn to do some good, to bring Jesus, to bear witness not with words but with works. Every day we can leave the house with our heart a little closed in on itself, or with an open heart ready to encounter and to donate. It gives far more joy to live with an open heart, than with a closed heart. Do you agree? I therefore wish you a Christmas to be lived with an open heart, conserving this beautiful spirit of family, and I thank you very much.
