SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO
HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Holy Father's visit to the "Roma Tre" University

At 9.50 a.m. today, Friday 17 February, the Holy Father visited the "Roma Tre" University to meet with the academic and student community. Upon arrival he was received by the Rector Mario Panizza, the director general Pasquale Basilicata, and the vice-rector, Maria Francesca Renzi.

During the meeting, in the University's main square, after the welcome speech from the rector, the Pope gave off-the-cuff answers to questions posed by four students, submitting to those present the written discourse prepared in advance. The visit concluded with an exchange of gifts and a brief greeting from the Holy Fathe to the representatives of the professors, students and staff of the University.

The following is the full text of the Holy Father's written address to those present.

To the Rector, distinguished professors, and dear students and staff members,

Thank you for having invited me to visit this university, the youngest in Rome, and I cordially greet you all. I thank the rector, Professor Mario Panizza, for his words of welcome, and I wish every success for the work and mission of this institution. The education and academic formation of the new generations is a primary need for the life and development of society. I have listened to your questions and am grateful for them; I read them in advance and will try to give answers, also taking my own experience into account.

Our society is rich in good, in acts of solidarity and love towards our neighbour: many people, many young people, certainly also among you, are involved in voluntary week and in activities of service to those most in need. And this is one of the greatest values to be grateful for and proud of. However, if we look around, we see that in the world there are many, too many signs of wickedness and violence. As Giulia rightly observed, there are numerous signs of "violent activity". Thank you Giulia, because the Message for World Peace Day this year proposes non-violence as a style of life and of political action. In effect, we are living a piecemeal world war: there are conflicts in many regions of the planet, which threaten the future of entire generations. How is it that the international community, with its organisations, is unable to prevent or stop all this? Do economic and

strategic interests have greater weight than the common interest in peace? These are certainly questions that find space in university lecture halls, and resonate first and foremost in our consciences. The university is a privileged place where consciences are formed, in a close encounter between the needs of the good, the true and the beautiful, and reality with its contradictions. A concrete example? The arms industry. For decades we have spoken about disarmament, and important processes have been undertaken to this end, but unfortunately today, despite all the speeches and commitments, many countries are increasing their expenditure on weapons. And this, in a world that still struggles against hunger and disease, is a scandalous contradiction.

Faced with this dramatic reality, you rightly wonder: how should we respond? Certainly not with an attitude of discouragement or distrust. You in particular, the young, cannot afford to be without hope: hope is part of you. When there is a lack of hope, there is a lack of life: and so some go in search of an existence offered by deceitful merchants of nothingness. They sell things that seemingly procure momentary happiness, but in reality introduce us to blind alleys, without future, true existential labyrinths. Bombs destroy bodies, whereas dependency destroys the mind, the soul, and also the body. And here I give you another concrete example of a current contradiction: the gambling industry. Universities can offer a valid contribution to studies to prevent and oppose gambling addiction, which causes grave damage to people and families, with high social costs.

A response I would suggest to you – and I am thinking of Niccolò's question – is that of being involved, as a university too, in projects of sharing and service to the least, to promote the growth in our city of Rome the sense of belonging to a common homeland. Many social emergencies and many situations of hardship and poverty challenge us: let us think of those who live on the streets, migrants, those who are in need not only of food and clothing, but also integration in society, for example those who leave prison. Approaching these forms of social poverty makes us protagonists of constructive actions that are opposed to the destructive ones of violent conflicts, and which are also opposed to the culture of hedonism and waste, based on the idols of money, pleasure and appearances. Instead, working with projects, even small ones, which favour encounter and solidarity, we restore together a sense of trust in life.

In every environment, especially in that of the university, it is important to read and face this epoch change with reflection and discernment, that is, without ideological prejudices, without fear or flight. Every change, including the current one, is a passage that brings difficulties, hardships and sufferings, but also new prospects for good. Great changes require us to rethink our economic, cultural and social models, to restore the central value of the human person. Riccardo, in the third question, referred to information that in a globalised world is conveyed especially by social networks. In such a complex field, it would appear to me necessary to apply a healthy discernment, based on ethical and spiritual values. It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves what is good, with reference to the values proper of a vision of man and the world, a vision of the person in all his or her dimensions, especially the transcendent.

And, speaking of transcendence, I would like to speak to you one to one, and offer witness of who I am. I profess myself Christian and the transcendence to which I open myself and look to has a name: Jesus. I am convinced that His Gospel is a force for true personal and social renewal. Speaking in this way, I do not propose illusions or philosophical or ideological theories, nor do I wish to proselytise. I speak to you about a Person Who came towards me, when I was more or less your age, Who opened new horizons to me, and changed my life. This Person can fill our heart with joy and our life with meaning. He is my travelling companion; He never disappoints or betrays. He is always with us. He appears with respect and discretion along the path of our life, and He supports us above all in the hour of loss and defeat, at the moment of weakness and sin, to restore us to the path. This is the personal testimony of my life.

Do not be afraid of opening up to the horizons of the spirit, and if you receive the gift of faith – because faith is a gift – do not be afraid to open up to the encounter with Christ and to deepen your relationship with Him. Faith never limits the scope of reason, but rather opens it to a holistic vision of man and of reality, preserving us from the danger of reducing the person to "human material". With Jesus difficulties do not disappear, but are faced in a different way, without fear, without lying to oneself and others; they are faced with the light and strength that comes from Him. And one can become, as Riccardo said, "workers of intellectual charity", starting from university itself, so that it is a place of formation in knowledge in the fullest sense of the term, of integral education in the person. From this perspective the university offers its specific and indispensable contribution to

the renewal of society.

And the university can also be the place where we process the culture of encounter and welcome for people of different cultural traditions and religions. Nour, who comes from Syria, referred to the West's "fear" of foreigners inasmuch as they might "threaten the Christian culture of Europe". Aside from the fact that the first threat to Christian culture in Europe comes precisely from within Europe, being wrapped up in oneself or in one's own culture is never the way to revive hope or initiate social or cultural renewal. A culture is consolidated in openness to and comparison with other cultures, provided it has a clear and mature awareness of its principles and values. I therefore encourage teachers and students to experience the university as an environment of true dialogue, that does not diminish diversity, but is instead open to constructive comparison. We are called to understand and appreciate the values of others, overcoming the temptation of indifference and fear. never be afraid of the encounter, of dialogue, of comparison.

As you proceed on your path of teaching and study in the university, try to ask yourselves: is my *forma mentis* becoming more individualistic or more fraternal? If it is more fraternal, it is a good sign, because you are going against the flow but in the only direction that has a future and that offers a future. Solidarity, not proclaimed in words but lived in a concrete way, generates peace and hope for every country and for the entire world. And you, for the fact of working and studying in the university, have a responsibility to leave a good imprint on history.

I cordially thank you for this meeting and for your attention. May hope be the light that always illuminates your study and your efforts. I invoke the Lord's blessing on every one of you and your families.