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Audience with members of the “Alunni del Cielo” Association

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the *Alunni del Cielo* (“Students of Heaven”) Association, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Association and the tenth anniversary of the passing of the founder, the Jesuit Father Giuseppe Arione.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends of the Alunni del Cielo Association,

I am happy to receive you on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of your Association and on the 10th anniversary of the death of your founder, the Jesuit Father Giuseppe Arione. A warm welcome to all of you! Your association, divided into two groups, *Revival* and *Amen*, is part of the ancient and prestigious “Social Institute” of Turin, whose educational purpose is enriched by the spiritual experience of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. With the help of your Assistant, Father Piero Granzino, you are committed to witnessing the Gospel with music and song, so as to reach the hearts of all, even those who are far from the Church or faith.

Your mission is carried out following the charism and testimony of Father Arione who, implementing the guidelines of Vatican Council II for a Church in dialogue with the contemporary world, in 1968 contrasted the attitude of protest with that of acceptance. He dedicated himself to a form of apostolate that used music and song as languages capable of transmitting in a universal way the beauty and strength of Christian love. He went out “to the crossroads”, even in places previously unexplored by the Church, to meet young people where they gathered and organized themselves. To all, without distinction, he presented himself with empathy and benevolence, proposing a journey of faith and fraternity. The aim was to evangelize with the song, proposing a faith that announces and sings the love of God, generating friendship and fraternal sharing.

I encourage you to carry forward the charism of this generous Jesuit, renewing it in its forms but preserving its

prophetic inspiration, which is still valid and current. To do this, it is necessary to care for one's inner life, without letting it be "stolen" by the worldly noise, but rather cultivating it through personal and community prayer, listening to the Word of God, and assiduous participation in the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist. Thus, your voices and melodies will not only be pleasing to good musical taste, but, enriched by your testimony of Christian life, will favour in those who listen to you the desire for communion with God. In this way, you will become ever more enthusiastic heralds of the Gospel.

Your mission is rooted in the tradition of the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, which invite you to celebrate the Lord with the harp, to sing to Him and to praise Him on the strings and flutes (see Psalm 33: 150). Singing well requires commitment and good will, but it is a gratifying effort, because it elevates the soul making, it more receptive to the voice of the Spirit, especially when your hymns accompany liturgical celebrations, allowing the faithful a greater rapprochement and deeper intimacy with God. In this way you help to express joy, trust, repentance, love ... Singing is a language that leads to the communion of hearts; I thank you in particular because, crossing every border, you spread a message of peace and fraternity.

In the choir one experiences the joy and charm of polyphony. I urge you to be "polyphonic" in everyday life too, both among yourselves and with others. First of all, keep in mind that, more than for the beauty of your songs, they will recognize you as disciples and witnesses of Christ if you love one another as He has loved us. Therefore you are called to be one heart and one soul. And towards others, remembering your Founder's pastoral care towards the poor and circus performers, you can continue to welcome these people into your communities and families, listening to them, singing with them the "Gospel of the little ones". This is your way of being a missionary Church, capable of spreading to and attracting those who await, perhaps without realizing, an encounter with Jesus.

I know that often you meditate on the words of Father Arione: "Walk to seek out others, stop to find yourself". The smile of your faces, the freshness of your voices, the harmony of your hymns dispose you to prayer and inspire in those who listen to you the true joy of life and hope in the future. With these wishes, I want to reiterate the Church's appreciation of your apostolate and, as I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saint Cecilia, I heartily bless you all and your loved ones. And please, remember to pray for me.
