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Video Message of the Holy Father to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart for the inauguration of the academic year 2021/2022, year of its centenary

The following is the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, for the inauguration ceremony for the academic year 2021-2022, which took place today in Milan, on the centenary of the University:

Video Message of the Holy Father

My greetings also go to Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan, president of the Toniolo Institute, and to the president of the European Commission, Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen.

This is a special day, because it celebrates an important anniversary: one hundred years ago, Father Agostino Gemelli and his collaborators gave life to that great cultural institution that is your University. All the best!

I would like to gather my thoughts around three words: *fire*, *hope* and *service*. Three words which, I believe, can represent a little of your mysticism [spirituality].

The first is an image: fire, the torch that has been passed on from generation to generation in your university. Anniversaries are a good time to remember the past. And looking back at the hundred years of life of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, we recognise an important educational tradition, brought to life through the dedication of hundreds of men and women and witnessed by thousands of graduates. Education is one of the most effective ways of humanizing the world and history,[1] and I believe that your University enshrines this teaching in its mandate. This is possible thanks to the appreciation - renewed through the generations - of the cultural and spiritual heritage that constitutes its identity. A clear and unchanged identity, which does not reject, but rather respects and welcomes different sensibilities, in the awareness that it is through a frank and respectful confrontation with others that the human condition flourishes. As the ancients had already understood: *to educate is not to fill vases but to light fires*. The Catholic University keeps this flame alive and can therefore transmit it because the only way to do so is "by contact", that is, through personal and community testimony.

Even before passing on what one knows, one lights the fire by sharing what one is. This contact comes about through encounter, through standing side by side with one another and doing something together. And this is the original meaning of what we call “university”, *uni-versitas*: when these realities began to emerge in the Middle Ages, they were born to make the different schools converge towards a single place. Many converging “towards one”, one place, one time, one spirit. In your case, a history illuminated by Faith, which restores unity to the universe of knowledge and weaves the unity of the people who contribute to its growth: the professors, the employees, the students. And this is the deepest sense of the word “tradition”. As Mahler said: “It is not keeping of the ashes of the past, but safeguarding of the future”.

The second word is *hope*. Today, this idea of education is challenged by an individualistic culture, which exalts the self in opposition to *us*, which promotes indifference – the culture of indifferences is ugly! -, diminishes the value of solidarity and sets in motion the throwaway culture. Indeed, those who educate look to the future with confidence, and carry out an action – that of education – that involves various players in society, so as to offer students an *integral* formation, the fruit of the experiences and sensibilities of many. This is, in particular, the mission of teachers, who are the creative custodians of tradition, which is an asset. Because, according to Gustav Mahler’s image, as I said, it is not a question of conserving the ashes but of protecting the flame. That is, carrying forward the image of the tree: the roots give life to the tree and, as the poet said, everything that blooms on the tree comes from what is underground. This harmony between root and growth.

Therefore, education is first and foremost a relationship: a relationship between teacher and student, and then among students. A community of people open to reality, to the transcendent Other and to others, open to knowing, discovering, posing questions and seeking answers together, answers for today. Not to be afraid of asking questions to seek answers. A community open to the world, without fear. Fear is ugly! This is hope: wagering on the future, defeating the natural urge that is born of the many fears that risk immobilising us, freezing us and locking us into an eternal and illusory present. Openness and acceptance of the other is therefore particularly important, because it favours a solidary bond between generations and combats the individualistic currents present in our culture. Above all, it builds an inclusive citizenship, as opposed to the culture of rejection, starting right from the university classroom.

With this in mind, I promoted a Global Educational Compact, to raise awareness of the great questions on the meaning of our time, starting from those of the new generations faced with social injustices, the violations of rights, and forced migrations. The university cannot remain deaf to these complaints. I am pleased that you have accepted this invitation to a renewed season of educational commitment. Your international cooperation projects, aimed at the various peoples of the planet, the many financial aid grants you provide every year to students in need, your attention to the least of the poor and to the sick, are evidence of a concrete commitment. I encourage you to continue along this path!

The world, nowadays especially, is totally interdependent: this condition demands an unprecedented effort, because this epoch change has rendered obsolete the interpretative frameworks of the past, which are no longer useful to understand the present. It is a matter of planning new models of thought in order to define solutions to the urgencies we are called upon to face: environmental to economic, social to demographic. We cannot continue with the enlightenment category. There is a need for new and creative thought. The Catholic University of the Sacred Heart can represent a privileged space for the advanced development of this cultural elaboration. And here we return to the teacher-student relationship – which is important! – which is a dynamic relationship, in tension between the present and the future: together you are called to think, plan and act, with the common home of tomorrow as a horizon, starting from the concrete reality of today.

And I address you, students, in a particular way. In these confused times, made even more complex by the pandemic, I repeat to you: *do not let yourselves be robbed of hope!* And do not let yourselves be infected by the virus of individualism. This is ugly and harmful. The university is the right place to develop antibodies to this virus: the university opens the mind to reality and diversity; there, you can put your talents into play and make them available to all. As students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, you belong to a study community with solid roots that you can draw upon for your formation and to renew, every day, the enthusiasm of going ahead and assuming your responsibility in society. Not to become traditionalists of the roots, no, but to take from the roots so as to grow, to go forward, to put your life at stake. This is the prospect I propose to you on

this centenary.

And so, we come to the third and final word: *service*. In reality, this word could be the first, because a new institution always begins from the founders who place their life in the service of others. And throughout the course of its one hundred years, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart has demonstrated on several occasions to be in the faithful *service* of the Church and of society. This is demonstrated by the commitment of its professors in their daily research activities and, for many of them, in positions of responsibility within Italian and international institutions. This is testified to by the work of the staff, who offer dedication and intelligence in order to make the functioning of the University possible. A thought of gratitude goes to each and every one of you, who are part of this great team; here too the logic is that of the *uni-versitas*: all together, all towards each other, each in his or her specific role, but all together, converging towards a shared horizon. Without the daily work of each one of you, this common project would be poorer, it would lack something, as if the timbre and tonality of some seemingly less important instruments were missing from an orchestra.

Dear brothers and sisters - and again I address all of you - you are, let me give you the example, a great orchestra, where the whole is essential, which is achieved if each one gives its best in harmony with the others. May the spirit of service always remain the hallmark of your entire university community, which only in this way is faithful to the Gospel which inspires it. The Lord Jesus Christ, although he was the Logos, divine Wisdom, chose the folly of serving to the point of total self-abnegation: the wisdom of the Cross. Thus he bore witness to the truth of God's love, and he, the King, taught us that to *serve* is to *reign*. May all those who study and work in your University breathe this spirit, learn this style, in order to live it in the complex reality of the contemporary world. Go forward, look to the horizon, with courage in your educational mission. Two words that will help us a lot: courage and patience. Enduring contradictions, things that do not go well, patience and the impetus of courage go together. They go together. You interpret this courage and patience as a passionate service to the whole of society; to the Church too, but to the whole of society. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[1]Video Message on the occasion of the meeting promoted and organised by the Congregation for Catholic Education: *Global compact on education. Together to look beyond* (15 October 2020).
