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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

N. 220516e

Monday 16.05.2022

### **Audience with rectors of the Universities of Lazio**

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the rectors of the universities of the Lazio region.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

#### **Address of the Holy Father**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you, rectors of the thirteen Universities, public, state and non-state, of Rome and Lazio, gathered in the Regional Coordination of the Universities of Lazio with the representatives of the Region. I greet the president, Professor Stefano Ubertini, rector of the University of Tuscia, and I thank him for his kind words of introduction.

A task of great responsibility is entrusted to universities in this particular historical moment. The years of the pandemic, the spread into Europe of the "piecemeal third world war", the global environmental question, and growing inequality challenge us in an unprecedented and accelerated way. A challenge with a strong cultural, intellectual and moral implication. This scenario is before the young generations, risking the creation of a climate of discouragement and bewilderment, loss of confidence, and worse still, inurement.

But the young do not accept this, and they are holding us to our responsibilities. So, this is truly the moment for a major investment in education. This is why the Global Compact on Education is being developed – it is a project of joint work on a global scale, which involves many stakeholders, from major religions to international institutions, to individual educational institutions. Signing in this spirit the document on human brotherhood in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019, we agreed that we care about an integral formation that is summed up in knowing oneself, one's brother, creation and the Transcendent.

This, in concrete terms, is the prospect of peace, which we rightly claim today and for which we pray intensely, and therefore of true and integral development, which cannot be built except with critical sense, freedom, healthy confrontation and dialogue. We are here at the very foundation of the idea of the university and the role that this institution cannot but have, beyond barriers and borders.

Indeed, there is much to be done, to ensure technological and scientific development, certainly, but also to guarantee human sustainability. Major changes demand that we rethink our economic, cultural and social models, to recover the central value of the human person[1]. And “the very term ‘university’ designates a community, but also an idea of the convergence of knowledge, in a research that provides truth and meaning to the dialogue between all men and women of the world” [2]. The service that the university can offer is therefore truly important; that you and the universities you represent can give, each with their own characteristics, to rethink and adapt our models of development, providing for the convergence of the best intellectual and moral energies. Students are not satisfied with mediocrity, mere repetition of data, nor with a professional formation without prospects. This is demonstrated, for example, by the great mobilization of many young doctoral candidates and researchers on the economy, coordinated by lecturers from your universities, precisely with the aim of constructing new and effective responses, overcoming the old residues of a sterile culture of the competition of power.

May you never be lacking in the strength to listen to students and colleagues; to listen to the social and institutional realities, both nearby and global, because the university has no boundaries: knowledge, research, dialogue, and exchange cannot but overcome every barrier, so as to be all-embracing[3]. May you also never lack the courage of imagination and investment, for a human development of research, so as to form young people of bringing something new to the world of work and society; to form them also in respect: respect for themselves, respect for their neighbour; respect for creation and respect with regard to the Creator.

In promoting excellence in study and in research, I urge you to keep watch so that those who are deserving but do not have the means may fully exercise their right to study and training. And likewise, to continue the praiseworthy effort in welcoming students, researchers and teachers who are victims of persecution, war and discrimination in various countries of the world. May you stimulate in many the forms of “learning-service” to the community, so that, measuring themselves against poverty and existential and social peripheries, they may give further meaning and value to their university education, never detached from the life of individuals and society.

We thus return to the intentionality proper to the university institution, in the convergent commitment of teaching, research, dialogue and confrontation with society. I hope that yours will be living communities, transparent, active, welcoming, responsible communities, in a fruitful climate of cooperation, exchange and dialogue, valuing each and every person. May you be able to read and face this epoch change with reflection and discernment, without ideological prejudices, without fear or fleeing, or worse, conformism.

We are just a few years away from the Jubilee of 2025. Let us recall that precisely three years after the first Jubilee celebration in 1300, the *Studium Urbis* was established, as if to show in practice and to reaffirm the native relationship between the Church and the university institution, one of the oldest and most paradigmatic expressions of European civilization, from whence it developed in the world. We are required to develop and pursue this ancient and consolidated relationship, in distinction and cooperation, in the responsible and sustainable construction of development paths.

The motto of the next Jubilee of 2025, *Pilgrims of Hope*, expresses this converging commitment, this striving towards shared goals of life, goodness and fraternity. This is my wish and my thanks to the Regional Coordination Committee of the Universities of Lazio. I accompany you with my blessing. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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[1] *Address to the University of Roma Tre*, 17 February 2017.

[2] *Address to the teachers and students of the Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta (LUMSA)*, 14 November 2019.

[3] Cf Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, Proemio.

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