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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in the Kingdom of Bahrain on the occasion of the “Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence” (3 to 6 November 2022) – Meeting with young people at the Sacred Heart School

Meeting with young people at the Sacred Heart School

In the afternoon, in his residence, the Holy Father Francis received a visit from the King of Bahrain, His Majesty Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa. During the course of the meeting, the Pope thanked His Majesty for the warm welcome given to him by the country.

At the end of the visit, Pope Francis left the papal residence and transferred to the Sacred Heart School where, at 17.00 (15.00 in Rome), the meeting with young people took place.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received at the entrance to the school by the director, Sr. Roselyn Thomas, A.C., two teachers, and some students who offered him a floral tribute. He then proceeded to the school gymnasium, where he met with around eight hundred students. After the entrance hymn, the words of welcome from the director of the Sacred Heart School, and the performance of a traditional dance, a Muslim student and a Catholic student gave their witness. Then, after a hymn and the testimony of a young Catholic from the Sacred Heart parish, Pope Francis delivered his discourse.

After the reading of messages for peace, the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, the blessing and the final hymn, the Holy Father signed the Book of Honour, and after taking leave, returned by car to the papal residence.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the meeting with young people:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, brothers and sisters, good evening!

Thank you for being here, from so many different countries and with such great enthusiasm! I would like to thank Sister Rosalyn for her words of welcome and for the commitment with which, together with many others, she oversees the administration of Sacred Heart School.

I am happy to have seen in the Kingdom of Bahrain a place of encounter and dialogue between different cultures and beliefs. As I look out at you, who are not all of the same religion and are not afraid of being together, I think that without you this coexistence of differences would not be possible. And it would have no future! In the dough of the world, you are the good leaven destined to rise, to break down many social and cultural barriers and to foster the growth of fraternity and innovation. You are young people who, as restless travellers open to the unexpected, are not afraid to exchange ideas with one another, to dialogue, to “make some noise” and mingle among yourselves; and so you become the basis of a society marked by friendship and solidarity. This, dear friends, is something essential in the complex and varied situations in which we live: to tear down certain barriers in order to bring about a world that is people-oriented and more fraternal, even if this involves facing a number of challenges. In this regard, taking a cue from your testimonies and your questions, I would like to offer you *three small invitations*, not so much as a teacher, but as someone concerned to support and encourage you.

My first invitation: *to embrace the culture of care*. Sister Rosalyn used that expression: “culture of care”. To care means to develop an inner attitude of empathy, an attentive gaze that takes us out of ourselves, a gentle presence that overcomes our lack of concern and makes us take an interest in other people. This is the turning point, the start of something new, the antidote to a world closed in on itself and, rife with individualism, a world that devours its children. A world imprisoned by a kind of sadness that gives rise to indifference and solitude. Let me say this to you: how badly the spirit of sadness hurts, how badly! If we do not learn to take care of our surroundings – other people, our cities, our society, the environment – we will end up spending our lives like those people who are constantly in a hurry, running around, doing many things at once, but in the end are sad because they have never really known the joy of friendship and generosity. Nor have they given the world that unique dab of beauty that they alone, and no one else, were capable of giving. As a Christian, I think of Jesus and I see that everything he did was inspired by care for others. He was concerned about relating to all whom he met, in their homes, in the towns and along the wayside. He looked people in the eye, listened to their pleas for help, drew near to them and touched their wounds. Do you look people in the eye? Jesus entered into our human history in order to tell us that the Most High cares for us. To remind us that being on God’s side involves caring for someone and something, especially for those who are in greatest need.

Dear friends, how beautiful it is to care for others, to build relationships! Yet, like everything in life, this calls for constant training. So do not forget, first of all, to care for yourself: not so much outside as inside, in the deepest and most precious part of yourselves. What part is that? It is your soul, your heart! And how can you care for the heart? By trying to be silent and listen to it. Try to make time to keep in touch with what is going on inside you, to appreciate the gift that you are, to take hold of your life and not let it slip through your fingers. Do not be “tourists of life”, who only see it from the outside, who only see the surface of things. In silence, following the rhythm of your heart, talk to God. Tell him about yourself and the people you meet each day, those he has given you as companions on your journey. Bring him their faces, their joys and sorrows, for there is no prayer without relationships, just as there is no joy without love.

And love – as you already know – is not a soap opera or a romantic film: to love is to take another person to heart, to care for others, to offer one’s time and gifts to those in need, to take risks and make life a gift that generates even greater life. Take risks! My friends, please, never forget one thing: you are all – without exception – a treasure, a unique and precious treasure. So, do not lock your life in a safe, thinking that it is better to save that treasure, that the time to spend it has not yet come! Many of you are passing through here because of work, often for a particular period of time. Yet if we live with that tourist mentality, we miss the present moment and risk throwing away whole pieces of our life! How beautiful it is, on the other hand, to make a positive mark on our journey even now, by caring for our community, our classmates, our co-workers, and for the world around us... We do well, then, to ask ourselves: what mark am I leaving now, here where I live, in this place where Providence has brought me?

This, then, is my first invitation, to embrace the culture of care. If we embrace it, we will help make the seed of

fraternity grow. And this is my second invitation: *to spread fraternity*. I liked what you said Abdulla: “You have to be a champion not only on the playing field, but in life!” Champions off the playing field. That is true, so strive to be champions of fraternity, off the playing field! This is the challenge of today that will make us winners tomorrow, the challenge faced by our increasingly globalized and multicultural societies. For you see, the devices and technology that modernity offers us are not enough to make our world peaceful and fraternal. We are witnessing this: the winds of war do not stop blowing with technological progress. We are seeing with sorrow that in many regions, tensions and threats are increasing and, at times, are breaking out in conflicts.

Often enough, this happens because we do not work on the heart; we allow distances between ourselves and others to increase and, as a result, ethnic, cultural, religious and other differences become problems and fears that isolate rather than opportunities to grow together. And when those differences seem more powerful than the fraternity that keeps us together, we risk confrontation and conflict.

To you, young people, who are more straightforward and more capable of making contacts and building friendships, overcoming prejudices and ideological barriers, I would like to say this: continue to sow the seeds of fraternity, and you will be *builders of the future*, because only in fraternity will our world have a future! This invitation is one that I find at the heart of my faith. Indeed, the Bible says, “Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this, that those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 Jn 4:20-21). Yes, Jesus tells us never to separate the love of God from love of neighbour, and to become neighbours to everyone (cf. Lk 10:29-37). Everyone, not just the people we like. To live as brothers and sisters is the universal vocation entrusted to every creature. You young people – you more than anyone else – in the face of the prevailing tendency to remain indifferent and intolerant of others, even supporting wars and conflicts, are called to “respond with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 6). Words are not enough: there is need for concrete gestures carried out on a daily basis.

Here too, we can ask ourselves a few questions. Am I open to others? Am I friends with someone who does not share all my interests, or has different beliefs and customs from mine? Do I try to meet others, or do I stick to the people I know? The key, in a few words, is in what Nevin told us: to “create good relationships” with everyone. You young people are eager to travel and learn about new lands, to go beyond your usual surroundings. I would say this: learn how to travel within yourselves as well, to expand your inner borders, so that prejudices against others can vanish, margins of distrust can narrow, fences of fear can be torn down, and fraternity and friendship can blossom! Let yourselves be helped by prayer, for prayer opens the heart, enabling us to encounter God and to see a brother or sister in everyone we meet. How beautiful, then, are the words of the prophet who said: “Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another?” (*Mal2*:10).

Societies like this, which are remarkably rich in various creeds, traditions and languages, can become “training grounds for fraternity.” We are standing at the gates of the great and multiform continent of Asia, which one theologian has called “a continent of many tongues” (A. PIERIS, *Teologia in Asia*, Brescia, 2006, 5). Learn how to blend those tongues in the one language of love, as true champions of fraternity!

I would also like to offer you yet a third invitation: *accept the challenge of making decisions* in life. You know from everyday experience there is no such thing as a life without challenges. Just as when you come to a fork in the road you have to choose, so, when faced with a challenge, you always have to put yourself on the line, take risks and make a decision. This requires good planning. You cannot improvise, living by instinct or always acting on the spur of the moment! So how do you prepare, how do you develop your decision-making ability, your creativity, your courage and your tenacity? How do you sharpen your inner gaze, learn to judge situations, and grasp what is important? It requires learning how to weigh your options and take the right direction. This is why the third invitation is *to make decisions* in life, right decisions.

All of this came to mind as I thought back to Merina’s questions. They were really about the need to understand what direction to take in life. She is brave, for the way she said things! I can speak from my own experience: I too was an adolescent like yourselves, like everyone else, and my life was that of a normal young person. As we know, adolescence is a process, that period in our growth when we begin to face the complexity of life and confront certain challenges for the first time. Well, my advice is to press forward without fear, but never go it alone! Two things: press forward without fear and never alone! God never leaves you alone; he waits for you to ask him to give you a hand. He accompanies and guides us, not by powerful signs and miracles, but by

speaking gently through our thoughts and feelings; and also through our teachers, friends, parents and everyone who wants to help us.

It is important, then, to learn how to distinguish his voice, God's voice that speaks to us. And how do we learn to do this? As you told us, Merina: through silent prayer and intimate dialogue with him, treasuring in our hearts what helps us and gives us peace. God's light illumines the maze of thoughts, emotions and feelings in which we often find ourselves. The Lord wants to enlighten your understanding, your innermost thoughts, the aspirations in your heart, and the judgements that are taking shape within you. He wants to help you distinguish what is essential from what is superfluous, what is good from what is harmful to you and to others, what is just from what leads to injustice and disorder. Nothing we experience is foreign to God, nothing. Often we are the ones who turn away from him; we fail to turn people and situations over to him, and instead turn in on ourselves in fear and shame. Let us cultivate in prayer the consoling certainty that the Lord watches over us, that he does not grow tired, but constantly watches out for us and keeps us safe.

Dear young friends, making decisions is not something we do alone. So let me say one last thing to you. Before you go to the Internet for advice, always seek out good counselors in life, wise and reliable people who can guide and help you. Do this first. I am thinking of parents and teachers, but also of the elderly, your grandparents, and a good spiritual guide. Each of us needs to be accompanied on the road of life! I will say again what I told you: never alone! We need to be accompanied on the road of life.

Dear young people, we need you. We need your creativity, your dreams and your courage, your charm and your smiles, your contagious joy and that touch of craziness that you can bring to every situation, which helps to break us out of our stale habits and ways of looking at things. As Pope, I want to tell you: the Church is with you and needs each one of you very much, so that we can be renewed, explore new paths, experiment with new languages, and become more joyful and hospitable. Never lose the courage to dream big and to live life to the full! Adopt the culture of care and spread it. Become champions of fraternity. Face life's challenges by letting yourselves be guided by God's faithful creativity and by good counsellors. And lastly, remember me in your prayers. I will do the same for you, carrying you in my heart. Thank you!

God be with you! *Allah ma'akum.*
