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Audience with managers and staff of the “Bambino Gesù” Paediatric Hospital

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the community of the “Bambino Gesù” Paediatric Hospital on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the donation of the Hospital to the Holy See by the Salviati family.

The following is the Pope’s address, which was read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli, and the Holy Father’s impromptu words to those present, at the end of the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

[Reading of the address of the Holy Father]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome to you all!

I am very pleased to meet you, as you commemorate the first centenary of the foundation of the “Bambino Gesù” Paediatric Hospital. A century ago, it was donated to the Holy See by the Salviati family: the first real hospital dedicated to children. The gift was welcomed by Pius XI, who saw in the work the expression of the charity of the Pope and of the Church towards the little patients, and from then on it has been known as the “Pope’s Hospital”.

Let us pause a moment, then, to reflect with gratitude on the richness of this institution, which has developed over a century of history, highlighting three aspects: *giving, care, and community*.

The first aspect: *giving*. Today “Bambino Gesù” is one of the largest centres for paediatric research and care, a reference point for families who come from all over the world. However, the element of giving, with values of gratuitousness, generosity, willingness and humility, remains fundamental, in its history and its vocation. It is good to remember, in this regard, the gesture of the children of Duchess Arabella Salviati who, at the beginning

of your history, gave their mother their moneybox as a gift in order to create a hospital for children: this tells us that this great work is based also on humble gifts, such as that of these young people for the benefit of their sick peers. And in the same vein, it is good, in our times, to mention the generosity of the many benefactors thanks to whom it was possible to build a Palliative Care Centre in Passoscuro for very young patients suffering from incurable diseases.

Only in this light can one fully understand the value of what you do, from the smallest to the largest things, and continue to dream for the future. Let us think, for example, of the prospect of a new site in Rome, the premises for which were recently set out in an agreement between the Holy See and the Italian State. Likewise, the considerable ordinary and extraordinary economic commitment, linked to the protection and maintenance of structures and equipment; to the guarantee of the professional quality of doctors and operators; to scientific research; to the reception of children in need from all over the world, offered without distinction of social condition, nationality or religion. In all this, *giving* is an indispensable element of your being and acting.

Second aspect: *care*. Science, and as a consequence the capacity to treat, can be said to be the first of the tasks that characterizes the “Bambino Gesù” Hospital today. It is the tangible response you give to the heartfelt requests for help from families who ask for their children to be assisted and, where possible, cured. Excellence in biomedical research is therefore important. I encourage you to cultivate it with the zeal to offer the best of yourselves, and with special attention towards the frailest, such as patients affected with serious, rare or ultra-rare diseases. Not only that, but so that science and expertise do not remain the privilege of a few, I urge you to continue to make the fruits of your research available to all, especially where they are most needed, as you do for example by contributing to the training of African, Asian and Middle Eastern doctors and nurses.

On the subject of care, we know that a child's illness involves all his or her family members. Therefore, it is a great consolation to know that there are so many families cared for by your services, accommodated in facilities linked to the hospital and accompanied by your kindness and closeness. This is a qualifying element, which should never be overlooked, even though I know that you sometimes work under difficult conditions. Rather we sacrifice something else, but not kindness and *tenderness*. There is no care without relationship, proximity and tenderness, at every level.

And finally, we come to the third point: *community*. One of the most beautiful expressions describing the mission of “Bambino Gesù” is “Lives that help life”. It is beautiful, because it speaks of a mission carried out together, a joint action in which the gift of each person finds its place. This is your true strength, and the prerequisite for facing even the most difficult of challenges. Indeed, yours is not a job like many others: it is a mission, which each person exercises in a different way. For some it involves the dedication of an entire life; for others, for others it involves volunteering time; for others, it involves the gift of blood, of milk - for hospitalized babies whose mothers cannot provide it -, and even the gift of organs, cells and tissues, offered by living people or taken from the bodies of deceased people. Love drives some parents to the heroic gesture of consenting to the donation the organs of their children who passed away. In all of this, what emerges is a “togetherness” in which the various gifts contribute to the good of the young patients.

Dear brothers and sisters, I confess that when I come to “Bambino Gesù” I feel two opposing sentiments: I feel *sorrow* for the suffering of the sick children and their parents, but at the same time I feel great *hope*, seeing everything that is done there to treat them. Thank you! Thank you for all of this. Keep going forward in this blessed work. I bless you from my heart, and I pray for you. And you too, please, pray for me. Thank you.

[Words of the Holy Father at the end of the reading of the address]

Now I will give the blessing to you all: to the sick, the doctors, the nurses and all the people who work in this Hospital and for this Hospital. Let us pray to Our Lady to help us to keep going. *Hail Mary...*

[Blessina]

