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Audience with artists from the world of comedy

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a representation of artists from the world of comedy, from various countries.

The event was organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Dicastery for Communication.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you, and to express my gratitude to those in the Dicastery for Culture and Education who have organized this meeting.

I hold you in high esteem as artists who express yourselves through the language of comedy, humour, and irony. Among all the professionals working in television, cinema, theatre, print media, with songs, and on social media, you are among the most loved, sought after, and popular. Certainly, it is because you are very good at what you do, but there is also another motivation: you have and cultivate the gift of making people laugh.

In the midst of so much gloomy news, immersed as we are in many social and even personal emergencies, you have the power to spread peace and smiles. You are among the few who have the ability to speak to all types of people, from different generations and cultural backgrounds.

In your own way, you unite people, because laughter is contagious. It is easier to laugh together than alone: joy opens us to sharing and is the best antidote to selfishness and individualism. Laughter also helps to break down social barriers, create connections among people, and allows us to express emotions and thoughts, contributing

to building a shared culture and creating spaces of freedom. You remind us that *homo sapiens* is also *homo ludens*! For playful fun and laughter are central to human life, to express ourselves, to learn, and to give meaning to situations.

Your talent is a precious gift. Together with a smile, it spreads peace in our hearts and among others, helping us to overcome difficulties and cope with everyday stress. It helps us find relief in irony and go through life with humour. I like to pray daily with the words of Saint Thomas More: "Grant me, O Lord, a good sense of humour". I ask for this grace for every day because it helps me approach things with the right spirit.

You also succeed in bringing about another miracle: you manage to make people smile even while dealing with problems and events, large and small. You denounce abuses of power; you give voice to forgotten situations; you highlight abuses; you point out inappropriate behaviour. You do this without spreading alarm or terror, anxiety or fear, as other types of communication tend to do; you rouse people to think critically by making them laugh and smile. You do this by telling stories of real life, narrating reality from your unique viewpoint; and in this way, you speak to people about problems, large and small.

According to the Bible, at the beginning of the world, while everything was being created, divine wisdom practiced your form of art for the benefit of none other than God himself, the first spectator of history. It is described in this way: "I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men" (*Prv* 8:30-31). Remember this: when you manage to draw knowing smiles from the lips of even one spectator, you also make God smile.

You, dear artists, know how to think and speak humorously in different forms and styles; and in each case the language of humour is suitable for understanding and "feeling" human nature. Humour does not offend, humiliate, or put people down according to their flaws. While communication today often generates conflict, you know how to bring together diverse and sometimes contrary realities. How much we need to learn from you! The laughter of humour is never "against" anyone, but is always inclusive, purposeful, eliciting openness, sympathy, empathy.

I am reminded of the story in the book of Genesis when God promised Abraham that within a year he would have a son. He and his wife Sarah were old and childless. Sarah listened and laughed inwardly. Abraham must have done the same. However, Sarah conceived and bore a son in her old age, at the time that God had set. Then Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me" (*Gen* 21:6). That is why they named their son Isaac, which means, "he laughs".

Can we laugh at God? Of course, we can, just as we play and joke with the people we love. The Jewish wisdom and literary tradition is a master in this! It is possible to do this without offending the religious sentiments of believers, especially the poor.

Dear friends, may God bless you and your art. Continue to cheer people up, especially those who have the hardest time looking at life with hope. Help us, with a smile, to see reality with its contradictions, and to dream of a better world! With heartfelt sentiments, I bless you; and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
