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Chirograph of the Holy Father regarding the Institution of the Pontifical Committee for World Children's Day

The social status of the child, throughout the history of humanity, has been the object of numerous theoretical and practical reworkings. In Jesus' time, children were not held in high regard, being "not-yet men". On the contrary, they irritated the rabbis who were intent on explaining the mysteries of the Kingdom.

In the Gospel, even the Apostles feared that children might disturb the Master who instead showed great fondness towards them. Not only was he not troubled by them, but He proposed them as models of discipleship, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (*Mk 10:14*). The disciples are called to imitate children not in having childish attitudes, something which Jesus rebukes, but in the wonder with which the child, even today, relates to life, for "whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it" (*Mk 10:15*). The gaze of the child is a gaze wide open to wonder, which sees what adults find difficult to see. Therefore, the disciple is called to grow in trust, in abandon, in wonder, in astonishment: all characteristics that age and disillusionment often extinguish in man.

The Christian revelation makes the Church aware that children are redeemed by the Blood of Christ and by His grace have become children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory. Therefore, they are valuable first and foremost for themselves, in the season of life they are living, and not only in view of what they can give to the family, society, the Church or the State in the future. The family, the Church, the State are for the children, and not the children for the institutions. The human being already from childhood is the subject of inalienable, inviolable and universal rights.

The Church, in the name of God authoritatively speaks out for the rights of the "non-guaranteed", as many children still are today. Faced with the spread of violence and dangers that encroach on the life and dignity of childhood, she makes herself the interpreter of their needs before all nations with even greater force.

The protection of children's rights is, indeed, the grave responsibility of parents, the civil community and the Church as an educating community. The protection of children's rights is the duty and first form of charity of the Church.

As Saint John Paul II teaches: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him ... if he does not experience it ... if he does not participate intimately in it" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, 4 March 1979, 10). This is why children need and have a right:

- To be acknowledged, welcomed and understood by their mother, father and family, to have confidence;
- To be surrounded by affection and to enjoy emotional security, whether or not they live with their parents, so as to discover their own identity;
- To have a name, a family and a nationality, respect and good reputation, in order to enjoy security and emotional stability in their living and upbringing conditions.

The child's right to grow up also involves the educational responsibility of the Church together with parents and the civil community. Children need to find, in the Church, the expression of Jesus the Good Shepherd in the face of those who take on education and training as a mission and apostolate, aware of their educational commitment.

In the light of what has been revealed so far, and with the aim of making tangible the Church's commitment to children, I have decided to establish World Children's Day in order to:

- a) give voice to the rights of children and place at the centre of the Church's pastoral action the same attention that Jesus had towards them, starting from the voice of "babes and infants" (*Ps* 8:3) to affirm the power and glory of God (cf. *ibid.*);
- b) promote an experience of the universal Church that is expressed in the diocesan and national dimensions, so that the entire Christian community may increasingly become an educating community capable first and foremost of being evangelized by the voice of the little ones;
- c) to permit the universal Church to clothe herself with the sentiments of the little ones recalled by the Saviour (cf. *Mt* 18:1-5), so that she may divest herself of "the signs of power and clothe herself with the power of signs" (VEN. ANTONIO BELLO, *Scritti di pace*, vol. IV, 146, no. 130), to become a welcoming and livable home for all, starting with children.
- d) to make Our Lord Jesus Christ better known, loved and served by children as Friend and Good Shepherd, and to root their faith in the tradition of the holy children that the Church has had as a gift and which she preserves as a spiritual heritage, to be transmitted to the little ones, their families and their educators;
- e) to highlight, both in catechistic preparation and in celebration, the Church as mother.

I wish this *Day* to be celebrated both at the level of the universal Church and in the particular Churches and at the level of their regional and national groupings. I entrust the preparation of *World Children's Day* to the regional and national Episcopal Conferences, which will set up local organizational committees.

In order that this initiative may find institutional anchorage within the Roman Curia, with the present Chirograph I erect the Pontifical Committee for World Children's Day, according it public canonical juridical personality in accordance with art. 241 of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and at the same time approving its Statute. I designate this Body as the coordinator and promoter of the initiatives of the National and Regional Organizing Committees.

So that *World Children's Day* does not remain an isolated event, and so that pastoral care for children may increasingly become a qualified priority in evangelical and pedagogical terms, the Pontifical Committee will be

available to collaborate with the competent pastoral offices of the particular Churches and Episcopal Conferences.

I order that the present Chirograph and the attached Statutes be promulgated by publication in *L'Osservatore Romano*, coming into force immediately, and then published in the official commentary of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

From the Vatican, 20 November 2024

FRANCIS
