

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS AT THE WORLD
CONFERENCE SPORT AND FAITH**

Paul VI Audience Hall

5 October 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am delighted to greet you, protagonists of the world of sport, together with the Authorities and the delegates of other religious communities, who have come to the Vatican to show, as the title of the international Conference suggests, the valuable *service that sport offers to humanity*. I greet you all and thank you. In particular, I greet Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture; Mr Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations; and Mr Thomas Bach, the President of the International Olympic Committee.

Sport is a human activity of great value, able to enrich people's lives; it is enjoyed by men and women of every nation, ethnic group and religious belonging. During these last few months, we have seen how the Olympic and Paralympic Games have been at the centre of attention of the whole world. The Olympic motto "*altius, citius, fortius*" is an invitation to develop the talents that God has given us. When we see athletes giving their very best, sport fills us with enthusiasm, with a sense of marvel, and it makes us almost feel proud. There is great beauty in the harmony of certain movements and in the power of teamwork. When it is like this, sport transcends the level of pure physicality and takes us into the arena of the spirit and even of mystery. And these moments are accompanied by great joy and satisfaction, which we all can share, even those not competing.

Another important characteristic of sport is that it is not just for high performance athletes. There is also sport for pleasure, for amateurs, for recreation, not aimed at competition, but allowing all to improve their health and wellbeing, to learn to be a part of a team, knowing how to win and also how to lose. This is why it is important to participate in sporting activities, and I am happy that at the centre of your reflections these days there is the commitment to ensure that sport is *always more inclusive* and that its benefits are truly accessible to all.

Our religious traditions share the commitment to ensure the respect for the dignity of every human being. So it is good to know that the world's sporting institutions have taken so courageously to heart the value of *inclusion*. The *Paralympic movement* and other sporting associations sustaining those with disabilities, such as the *Special Olympics*, have had a decisive role in helping the public recognise and admire the extraordinary performances of athletes with different abilities and capacities. These events present us with experiences in which the greatness and purity of sporting gestures stand out clearly.

But in this moment I am also thinking about those many children and the youth who live at the edges of society. Everybody is aware of the enthusiasm with which children will play with a rugged old deflated ball in the suburbs of some great cities or the streets of small towns. I wish to encourage all of you – institutions, sporting societies, educational and social organisations, religious communities – to work together to ensure these children can take up sport in circumstances of dignity, especially those who are excluded due to poverty. I am pleased to know that present at the conference are the founders of the *Homeless Cup* and other foundations that, through sport, offer the most disadvantaged a possibility of integral human development.

I desire to point out also a task and a challenge for you, representatives of sport and of the businesses that sponsor sporting events. The challenge is that of maintaining the honesty of sport, of protecting it from the manipulations and commercial abuse. It

would be sad for sport and for humanity if people were unable to trust in the truth of sporting results, or if cynicism and disenchantment were to drown out enthusiasm or joyful and disinterested participation. In sport, as in life, competing for the result is important, but playing well and fairly is even more important! Don't forget, none of us should forget, that beautiful word that describes true sport: amateur sport.

I thank all of you, then, for your efforts to uproot every form of corruption and manipulation. I know there is a campaign underway led by the United Nations to fight against the cancer of corruption in all areas of society. When people strive to create a society that is fairer and transparent, they collaborate with the work of God. We too, responsible for different religious communities, wish to offer our contribution for that commitment. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, she is working in the world of sport to bring the joy of the Gospel, the inclusive and unconditional love of God for all human beings.

I trust that these days of meeting and reflection will allow you to explore further the good that sport and faith can bring to our societies. I entrust to God all that you do, every hope and expectation, and from my heart invoke his blessing on each one of you; and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.