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Message of the Holy Father to the Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

The following is the Message of the Holy Father to the prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, on the occasion of the publication of the new document of the Dicastery “*Giving the very best of yourself*”, on the Christian perspective of sports and the human person:

Message of the Holy Father

*To My Venerable Brother
H.E. Kevin Cardinal Farrell
Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life*

With joy I received the news of the publication of the document “Dare il meglio di sé” (“Giving the best of yourself”) on the Christian perspective of sports and the human person, which the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life has prepared with the aim of highlighting the role of the Church in the sports world and how sports can be an instrument of encounter, formation, mission, and sanctification.

Sports is a *meeting place* where people of all levels and social conditions come together to reach a common aim. In a culture dominated by individualism and the gap between the younger generations and the elderly, sports is a privileged area around which people meet without any distinction of race, sex, religion, or ideology, and where we can experience the joy of competing to reach a goal together, participating in a team, where success or defeat is shared and overcome; this helps us to reject the idea of conquering an objective by focusing only on ourselves. The need for others includes not only teammates but also managers, coaches, supporters, the family; in short, all those people who, with commitment and dedication, make it possible to “give the best of oneself.” All this makes sports a catalyst for experiences of community, of the human family. When a father plays with his son, when children play together in the park or at school, when an athlete celebrates the victory with his or her supporters, in all these environments we can see the value of sports as a place of unity and encounter between people. We reach great results, in sports as in life, together, as a team!

Sports is also a *formative vehicle*. Perhaps today more than ever, we must fix our gaze on the young, because the earlier the process of formation begins, the easier the person's integral development through sports will be. We know how the new generations look at sportsmen and are inspired by them! The participation of all athletes of every age and level is, therefore, necessary; because those who are part of the sports world exemplify virtues such as generosity, humility, sacrifice, constancy, and cheerfulness. Likewise, they should make their contribution to the group spirit, to respect, healthy competition, and solidarity with others. It is essential for all of us to be aware of the importance of examples in the practice of sports, because a good plow on fertile land favors the harvest, provided that it is cultivated and the work is done properly.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the role of sports as a *means for the mission and sanctification*. The Church is called to be a sign of Jesus Christ in the world, also through the sports practiced in oratories, parishes, schools, and associations... Every occasion is good for announcing Christ's message, "whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (2 Tm 4:2). It is important to bring, to communicate this joy transmitted by sports, which is none other than the discovery of the human potentials that incite us to unveil the beauty of creation and of the human being, made in the image and likeness of God. Sports can open the way to Christ in those places or environments where, for different reasons, it is not possible to announce Him directly; and people, with their witness of joy, practicing a sport as a community, can be messengers of the Good News.

To give the best of oneself in sports is also a call to aspire to holiness. At the recent meeting with the young in view of the Synod of Bishops, I expressed the conviction that all the young people present there, physically or through social networks, had the desire and the hope of giving the best of themselves. I used the same expression in the recent Apostolic Exhortation, recalling that the Lord has a unique and specific way of inviting each of us to holiness: "The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts" (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 11).

We need to deepen the close connection that exists between sport and life, which can enlighten one another, so that the effort to surpass oneself in an athletic discipline also serves as a stimulus to always improve as a person, in all of life's aspects. This pursuit puts us on the path that, with the help of God's grace, can lead us to the fullness of life that we call holiness. Sport is a very rich source of values and virtues that help us to become better people. Like the athlete during training, practicing sport helps us to give our best, to discover our limits without fear, and to struggle daily to improve. In this way, "to the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world" (*ibid.*, 33). For the Christian athlete, holiness will, therefore, consist in living sports as a means of encounter, personality formation, witnessing, and proclaiming the joy of being Christian with the people around oneself.

I pray the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that this document may produce abundant fruit, both in the ecclesial commitment to the pastoral ministry of sports and beyond the sphere of the Church. I ask all athletes and pastoral workers who recognize themselves in the great "team" of the Lord Jesus to please pray for me, and I send them my heartfelt blessing.

Vatican City, June 1, 2018
Memorial of Saint Justin, Martyr

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