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Audience with staff and students of the “Ambrosoli” Institute of Codogno, Lodi

The following is the Holy Father Francis’ address to the staff and students of the “Ambrosoli” Institute of Codogno, Lodi, whom he received in audience this morning in the Vatican Apostolic Palace:

Address of the Holy Father

Thank you all, dear friends, and welcome! Thank you for your presence. This meeting should have taken place, I believe, last February, on the anniversary of the beginning of the epidemic in Europe, in the town of Codogno. I would like to thank the head teacher for her introductory words. I thank perhaps the best-known citizen of Codogno, Archbishop Fisichella, and I thank all of you. Thank you.

As soon as I received your proposal, I saw that it was important to accept it, because your school, in the context of this difficult situation, represents a sign of hope. First of all because it is a school, that is, a place of education *par excellence*. Secondly, specifically, because it is a technical-vocational institute, i.e. it directly prepares young people for work; and it is precisely work, employment, that has been one of the victims of this pandemic. So you are a dual sign of hope. But if you are a sign of hope, it is because, as the head teacher said, “you have never lost heart”. That is decisive. I congratulate you!

In recent months I have received news of several very positive experiences from groups of teachers and students, in Italy and in other countries. Experiences that show that when the generativity of teachers meets the “dreams” of students, there is no virus that can stop them! You boys and girls have a strength within you, a desire which, if it is stimulated and accompanied with wisdom and passion by adults, bears surprising fruit. The head teacher said it well: we need teachers who are “masters” in the noblest sense of the term.

In particular, your Institute highlights the link between learning and doing, between studying and working, between the “head” and the “hands”. One is missing: the heart. The three languages: that of the head, that of the heart and that of the hands. They are needed to reach coordination, whereby you think what you feel and do, you feel what you think and do, and you do what you feel and think. That total coherence... And these three

dimensions must always interact in the school, as they are connected in the person, in the journey of life. Head, heart and hands: a circle that must always be kept open and dynamic.

The relational dimension between you students, and also with your teachers, has been compromised during the long months of distance learning. I now hope that you will be able to resume it fully. But I also invite you to learn from this lack: that, in a certain sense, this negative experience can teach you something, namely the importance of real, not virtual, interpersonal relationships. You boys and girls are children of the digital society, which has opened up new avenues of knowledge and communication; but we know well by now that there is a danger of closing in on ourselves and always seeing reality through a filter that only seemingly increases our freedom. May the experience of the pandemic, with this "abstinence" from relations of friendship, stimulate in you, who are aware of it, a greater critical sense in the use of these instruments, so that they remain such - that is, tools, subject to our intelligence and will.

And another thing I want to say to you: surely you have heard many times: "young people, we must care for young people because they are the future". That is not true: you are the present, you are the present. You must not think of moving towards the future: you will be the future if you are the present. You are the present in society. Without young people, a society is almost dead. You are present because you bring new life. Do not forget this.

Dear friends, thank you again for your visit. I wish you a successful conclusion to this school year - we are almost there! -not only in terms of grades, but also and above all in terms of faces! May each one of you feel the desire to thank God for the opportunity of school: a place where you can grow with your head, your hands and your heart; a place where you can learn to live your relationships in an open, respectful and constructive way; a place where you can become aware and responsible citizens. I bless you and I accompany you in prayer. And you too, please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you!
