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Audience with participants in the “Christmas Contest”

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the participants in the “Christmas Contest”, organized by the *Gravissimum Educationis* Pontifical Foundation, in collaboration with the *Ausilia* Association.

The following is the Pope’s greeting to those present during the meeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Cardinal Tolentino for the presentation of this initiative, which has the merit of giving a voice to the young, highlighting their creativity. For this reason, I am grateful to the *Gravissimum Educationis* Foundation, which inspires this network and has proposed the *Christmas Contest*, and the *Ausilia* Association, which works to increase opportunities for young people and has decided to support this project. And this year too I am pleased to meet you, young singers and musicians, who have decided to participate in the Contest. Inspired by the coming of Christmas, it is intended to promote the values of life, love and peace.

I address you, young artists. I do not know if I may give you some advice, may I? Good. Do not try to copy the big “stars” of showbusiness. Do not follow the fashions and mindsets of success. Do not repeat the clichés of a false, mawkish Christmas, which has nothing to do with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and with its meaning for humanity today. Instead, do not be afraid to be yourselves. They will criticize you? Yes, but be yourselves, original, creative. Your own personality in art. And above all, do so in a way that at the basis of your work there is *wonder*. We have lost the sense of wonder, and we need to rediscover it. Let there be wonder at the basis, wonder in the face of the unthinkable: a God who became flesh, who became a helpless child, born of a Virgin, in a cave, and whose cradle was a manger for animals. Wonder. If one does not feel wonder, the song does not speak to the heart, does not communicate....

Besides wonder, another indispensable ingredient is simplicity. Beware: simplicity, not banality! No. Simplicity is an entirely different thing. The Nativity scene is simple, but it is not banal. The songs of Saint Alphonsus, such as “*Tu scendi dalle stelle*”, are simple, but beautiful and meaningful, and continue to move us and to nurture the faith of the people of God. And this is not sentimentalism, this is more, it is what comes from within, it is authentic.

With this creative style of wonder and simplicity, you can give your contribution to the cause of *peace*, which is the great gift God wished to give to the world with the birth of his Son. In these months, the clamour of war has been growing in Europe and in the world. Let us not give in to this blackmail, please! Let us not fall into this trap! Let us continue to dream of peace and to work for peace, scattering seeds of fraternity and social friendship. The outstretched hand, always the outstretched hand! You do this with music, and it is very valuable, because music is a universal language which crosses borders and barriers. Music also has an inestimable *educational* value. I underline this because this initiative is organized by the Pontifical Foundation that is inspired by a Council document on education. Music *humanizes*, and to educate means essentially to humanize. How we need to become more human today! That is why, after all, God became man, to share this path with us.

Dear friends, I wish you all the best for this Contest and for your artistic progress. I bless you all, with your families, and I ask you to pray for me. And if one of you cannot pray, or does not know how to pray, at least send me good vibes, for I need them.
