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Audience with managers and players of the Real Club Celta of Vigo, Spain

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the managers and players of the *Real Club Celta de Vigo*, Spain, on the occasion of the centenary of its founding, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, dear bishop of Vigo, dear Monsignor Carballo,

I am thankful to receive you in this celebration of the first centenary of your sports club. I have often repeated that sport is a reason and an opportunity to rediscover and promote many values in our society and, in this sense, meeting a “Galician” club is for me something that evokes many experiences that as an Argentine I have lived through. If you have noticed, your colours are those of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and also those of the Argentine jersey, almost as if our Mother had wanted to be nestled between the two shores of this great ocean, which rather than separating us has united us, so that we would never forget her.

Don Carlos told me in his letter that he too had to cross the Atlantic to form a family; like many others, he surely contemplated from a distance that white and blue flag that greeted him from the harbour master’s office in the port of Vigo. And this is the story of many migrants who arrived in Argentina, isn’t it? A little piece of his heart remained there waiting for him. He was not the only one who left it: in a way we could say that the heart of humanity is made up of all those little pieces that, by staying or leaving, remind us deep down that we are all united; that we are all pilgrims in this stormy sea of existence. Certainly, at times it is not so stormy.

And if the blue that gives colour to your shield shows your trust in the Virgin’s protection, the cross of Saint James stands as a banner of victory in the battle of life. The cross too, in remembering your Galician homeland, unites it to Europe and, in it, to the whole of Christendom, which from time immemorial has been retracing the

footsteps of the first Apostle who shed his blood for Christ.

Perhaps some of you have already noticed the profound significance of this emblem that you so proudly defend. Sometimes it happens to us that we work hard, we fight, we want to be happy, to win, to prove ourselves, but, caught up in defending our colours, we forget their meaning. Always recovering the poetic history. But roots are important, they give us meaning; yours speak to us of a land that is not closed to the brother who comes as a pilgrim and to people capable of leaving everything behind to embark on the highest undertakings. A spirit of healthy adventure and a spirit of fraternal hospitality.

Both in the stadium and in life, your strengths, like the cross of Santiago that presides over it, are those small gestures that we sometimes do not give importance to: winning with humility, working as a team without relying on your own strength, understanding that victory belongs to everyone. Teamwork is important: when you don't work as a team in the world of sport, everyone loses. It also means giving oneself generously, sparing no effort, knowing that sacrificing oneself for others when necessary, and accepting that confrontation with other teams serves to improve, to learn, to put ourselves to the test and to evaluate our entire game.

And in this sense, the other, more than an opponent worthy of respect, is always a welcome friend. If our game and our life, coherent with each other, give this example, we will be able to transmit, not the passion for colours that exclude, but the love for what they represent. For those white-and-blue flags and that path of the Apostle that make us capable of crossing oceans and uniting continents, waiting for the crown of justice that the Lord, the Judge, will bestow on all those who hope in Him.

And I would not like to finish without mentioning a task, an aspect that is hard work, but which must always be maintained: the amateur dimension. When sport, in this case your sport, loses this "amateur", friendly dimension, it becomes meaningless, it becomes commercial or simply aseptic, without passion. Please keep this "amateur" spirit. Never lose the amateur dimension.

May God bless you all and may Our Lady watch over you. Thank you.
