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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 180th anniversary of the founding of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to Archbishop Emilio Nappa, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), to missionary children and young people, their parents and formators, on the occasion of the 180th anniversary of the founding of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood:

Message of the Holy Father

Reverend Excellency,
dear missionary children and young people,
parents, formators and friends!

Last 19 May marked 180 years since the founding of the *Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood*, and many of you are still celebrating this happy anniversary in these days.

Bishop Charles de Frobin Janson of Nancy, a pastor gifted with a great apostolic heart, founded it in 1843, having come to discover, through the letters of French missionaries, that many boys and girls in China were dying of hunger and neglect. This gave rise in him to a strong concern for their salvation, not only physical but also spiritual, since Jesus, the Son of God, died and rose again for the salvation of all.

It is indeed from his missionary zeal, then, on the occasion of this anniversary, that we can draw a first important lesson: that of caring for the salvation of others. As true disciples of Jesus, in fact, cultivating in us a heart similar to his, we cannot help but ardently desire that all be saved. This is how your beautiful association began, which still today, active and vibrant after 180 years, teaches so many children and young people around the world to be *missionary disciples*.

This year also marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of a very special member of the Society: Saint Thérèse of

the Child Jesus, patroness of the missions, who was a member from the age of seven. Today, 1 October, we celebrate her liturgical memorial, and it is from her that we can receive a second precious message: with our prayer, even if we are small, we can contribute to making Jesus known and loved, silently, helping others to do good. Prayer - Saint Teresina teaches us - is the first missionary action, and can reach every place in the world, every child and young person, every missionary. That is why I invite you to grow, through it, in friendship with our Saviour, and in friendship among yourselves and with all the children and young people of the world, so as to be peacemakers.

Dear missionary children and young people, I want to thank you, because with your efforts you help all of us to be courageous witnesses of the Gospel and to share with others, not only material assistance, but what is most precious to us: faith. And I also want to thank your parents and the animators who accompany you, promoting the charism and spirituality of the *Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood*.

It is a "Pontifical Society", and therefore universal, of the Catholic Church, of the Pope, and so I consider you my special collaborators. I remind you, though, that this qualification also implies a further important commitment: that of building bridges and relationships, following the example of Christ Himself, and I urge you to do this too.

Continue to work according to the charism that Bishop Charles de Forbin Janson left you, following the "little way" of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, faithful to your motto: "Children praying for the children, children evangelizing children, children helping children worldwide".

May the Lord bless you and accompany you always, and please, do not forget to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 1 October 2023

FRANCIS
