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Words of the Holy Father to children participating in the “Children’s Train” initiative organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture

At midday today, in the Atrium of the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis met with the children participating in the “Children’s Train” initiative organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture as part of the “Courtyard of the Gentiles”, which brought to the Vatican around four hundred children from the municipalities affected by the earthquakes in Central Italy. The theme is the protection of Creation, or rather, “Little travellers, great ambassadors, guardians of the Earth”.

The following is a transcript of the dialogue between the Pope and the children present at the event.

Words of the Holy Father

Pope Francis: Boys and girls, they tell me that I have to speak. But I like listening! You, do you like speaking? Come, come. Do you want to speak? Come, tell me something. Tell me something, say something.

Girl:

I went to the restaurant.

Pope Francis:

Ah, this one wants to go to the restaurant! She is hungry, she wants to eat!

Girl:

Yes! Then I will go home.

Pope Francis:

When she said, "I want to go to the restaurant", it is a way of saying to the Pope, "Don't make this too long! [laughter]. I want to eat!". You are good. Go, go back there. And you? Do you want to speak?

Boy:

Yes! Today my mummy brought a parcel.

Pope Francis:

Good. And you, what do you want to say?

Girl:

I want to say that today we are going to the seaside.

Pope Francis:

You are going to the sea? Tell me...

Girl:

Today I am going to go to the seaside with my mummy and my sister and my cousin; they are called Yasmin and Alessandra. I am six years old, my sister is eight and Yasmin is ten.

Pope Francis:

Good, good.

Boy:

I represent Norcia and Cascia. The majority of the houses and churches were destroyed by the earthquake. Since the earthquake, a river has overflowed that until then was dry; after the earthquake, because of the strong tremors, the water returned and now it is very powerful. We wanted to thank you for having us here, both the children from Norcia and the other children.

Pope Francis:

Thank you. And I would like some of you to tell me how those days were after the earthquake... You, come here, come; tell me.

Boy:

They were difficult.

Pope Francis:

Yes. Tell me, why were they difficult? Tell me, tell me.

Boy:

We had difficulties because of the houses and buildings that had collapsed. And our schools.

Pope Francis:

Even the schools?

Boy:

Yes.

Pope Francis:

When I went there, the school was in a tent.

Boy:

It is true.

Pope Francis:

Even now?

Boy:

Yes.

Pope Francis:

And you, now, how have you recovered, all of you?

Boy:

We have recovered because they brought us little houses and new schools.

Pope Francis:

We have to recover, you know? When these calamities happen, there is the strength to recover.

Boy:

It is true.

Pope Francis: And you have been good.

Boy:

Thank you.

Pope Francis:

Thank you, thank you.

Girl:

For a while we went to school in the afternoon, because we were in demountables. Now, however, we have schools where we have started school again in the morning, and so we have returned to the normal timetable.

Pope Francis:

So, normal things have started again?

Girl:

Yes, normally; we have started school in the morning, up to half past one.

Pope Francis:

No-one has missed the year?

Girl:

No, no.

Pope Francis:

This is good.

Girl:

Yes, it is.

Pope Francis:

And you, how have you seen the people, the courage of the people? What have you seen there?

Girl:

I think that, thanks to the head teacher, we started school again straight away, even after many problems with the school that was in any case uninhabitable, but we started again straight away. Without problems.

Pope Francis:

Thank you.

Girl:

Thank you.

Girl:

My name is Gaia, I am from Acquasanta.

Pope Francis:

From Acquasanta... good.

Gaia:

On 24 August [date of the earthquake] my classmates, all those who attended the school, in practice we were all very afraid, because we didn't know who was alive, what had happened to the school, to other people's houses... Fortunately, everyone was safe. In Acquasanta there weren't particular damages, let's say. But our school was uninhabitable and so they rebuilt it.

Pope Francis:

And did everyone collaborate and work to rebuild it?

Gaia:

Yes.

Pope Francis:

And this is good, because when we all work together, for the same purpose, things go better, don't they?

Gaia:

We say that in fact we started again from the school, as a project.

Pope Francis:

Thank you. Good, good.

Gaia:

Thank you, goodbye!

Boy:

My name is Juan Camillo and I come from Norcia. After the earthquake, it took us a long time to start again, to have the movement to go to school. Afterwards we went into a big tent, all together, then we went into the tents for a few days, then in the higher schools and finally the demountables, and we went only in the afternoon. Then, around March, we started up in the morning in the demountables near the hospital. Afterwards we continued to do the morning and it was much better as we were fresher in the morning. Instead by the afternoon we were very tired.

Pope Francis:

Good.

Juan Camillo:

Goodbye!

Girl:

I am Ginevra, and my sister is in Fiastra... My grandmother's house collapsed. My grandmother was saved though, because the house fell down with the earthquake, and my sister and grandmother had gone outside. Now they are restructuring the house because they have to repair it.

Pope Francis:

Tell me... Have you finished?

Ginevra:

Yes.

Pope Francis:

Thank you.

Girl:

I am Maria Vittoria and I am from Cascia. I wanted to say that after the earthquake, there were many problems. First we were in a factory, then they gave us a wooden structure. We would like it very much if you came to Cascia, one of these days.

Pope Francis:

Thank you.

One word. I have listened to you. What you have lived is a bad thing, because it is a calamity. Is it true or not? It is a calamity. And calamities injure the soul. But the Lord will help you recover. Do you trust in the Lord, or not?

Children:

Yes!

Pope Francis:

Are you sure?

Children:

Yes!

Pope Francis:

And also in Our Lady?

Children:

Yes!

Pope Francis:

And now, if we have confidence, let us thank Our Lady for the good things that she gave us in this calamity: Hail Mary...

One of the things that Jesus likes most, one of the words that the Lord likes most of all is "thank you very much". I want to thank you and say thank you to you for this visit, for coming here, for coming also to recall that bad moment. But we must also all say thank you to those children – those boys and girls – who have come from Rio de Janeiro, and played music from my homeland, which moved me. And I would like to invite them to come closer, so we can all say "thank you" to them. They are called "Tide of tomorrow": an applause to them!

[Blessing]

And thank you very much for the visit!

Ah! Was the train good?

Children:

Yes!

Pope Francis:

Are you hungry?

Children:

Yes!

Pope Francis:

Did you hear? They are hungry [they say: it's ready!]

It's ready, it's all ready... Goodbye, and thank you!
