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Audience with the Italian National Football Team

Yesterday morning, at 9.00 a.m., the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Italian National Football Team and the managers of the Italian Football Federation on the occasion of the initiatives of the National Team deriving from its link with the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital and of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of this institution. The meeting was also attended by the president of the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital, Dr. Mariella Enoch.

The following is the Pope's greeting to those present during the audience:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Thank you for coming. It is good to see your courage after a game: to come here so soon... You can see that here there is the "mystique" [the spirit]. Thank you. Thank you very much.

You were with the children [of the Bambino Gesù Hospital] – I know – and there emerged that tenderness that we all have, but that very often we hide, it is hidden inside. But tenderness always comes out when faced with a child, doesn't it?

When I entered, I saw, on the left, a painting, a fantasy about the creation of the world. When you get out, look at it. It is the hands of God that give birth to a child. The artist thought that every birth is a creation. It is always a creation, even those times when creation is not perfect and there is the pain of children, as you were able to see during your visit, and also you know "the abc", as a cross borne by the family perhaps, sometimes. But they are the hands of tenderness. In the language for understanding a child and for approaching a child there is tenderness, always. The only thing the child understands, and that we begin to understand in front of a child: the language of tenderness. I know that you were there with them. Thank you for this gesture of tenderness. Thank you.

And then, the ball [that they gave to the children]. You have given something beautiful. Don Bosco also used to

say: “How do you make children happy, how do you bring children together?” – at that time, in poor, abandoned neighborhoods – “throw a ball on the street and the children will immediately come”. The ball has an attraction. I remember that there was a small square a few meters from my house. We used to play there, but we didn’t always have a ball at our disposal, because at that time the ball was made of leather, it was very expensive. There was still no plastic, there were still no rubber balls... There was a cloth ball. Even with a rag ball you can work miracles. And the children of Mozambique, when I was there, brought me a ball of rags. That is how they play. It is important to have a ball there, anyway, so that they can run after it.

There is an Argentine film with this title – “The ball of rags” – “Pelota de trapo” in Spanish, which shows the “mystique” [the spirit] of what you [the President of the FIGC] said, even with a ball of rags. A film perhaps from the 1940s, well made, very beautiful, poetic.

I leave you with these two works of art: what I said [the painting], God’s tenderness in the creation of each person, of a child; and the “ball of rags”, the film. Perhaps you will wish to see it. And thank you, thank you very much for this gesture, this gesture of great men who are capable of tenderness, of approaching a child. Perhaps more than one of you, later, alone, wept. Perhaps that is the case. Tenderness always betrays us! One makes a gesture of tenderness and then weeps in secret, because that is show it is! That is how life is. Thank you, truly. They are gestures that do us good, they are gestures that bring health, they bring health. Thank you.

And now I would like to greet you one by one.
