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Audience with participants in the Meeting for Education in Peace and Care

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the students and teachers participating in the Meeting for Education in Peace and Care.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear boys and girls, dear teachers, good morning and welcome!

I am glad that you responded enthusiastically to the invitation of the National Network of Schools for Peace. Thank you for coming! And thank you to all those who organized this meeting, especially Dr. Lotti.

I congratulate you, students, and your educators on the rich programme of activities and training you have undertaken, which will culminate with the Perugia-Assisi March in May next year, where you will have the opportunity to present the results of your work and your proposals.

Assisi has now become a world centre for the promotion of peace, thanks to the charismatic figure of that carefree and rebellious young man from Assisi named Francis, who left his family and riches to follow the Lord and to marry Madonna poverty. That young dreamer is still a source of inspiration today for all that relates to peace, brotherhood, love for the poor, ecology and economics. Throughout the centuries, Saint Francis has fascinated many people, just as he has fascinated me too, who as Pope chose to take his name.

Your educational programme "*For Peace, with Care*" is intended as a response to the call for a Global Educational Covenant, which I addressed three years ago to all those who work in the field of education, to appeal to them to promote "the values of care for others, peace, justice, goodness, beauty, acceptance and fraternity" (*Video Message* of 15 October 2020). And I am happy to see that not only schools, universities and

Catholic organizations are responding to this call, but also public, secular and other religious institutions.

For there to be peace, as your motto so aptly puts it, one must “care”. We often talk about peace when we feel directly threatened, as in the case of a possible nuclear attack or a war being waged on our doorstep. Just as we take an interest in the rights of migrants when we have some relative or friend who has emigrated. In reality, peace always concerns us, always! Just as the other, our brother and sister, always concern us, and we must take care of him or her.

A quintessential model of caring is that Samaritan of the Gospel, who rescued a stranger he found wounded along the road. The Samaritan did not know whether the unfortunate man was a good person or a scoundrel, whether he was rich or poor, educated or ignorant, a Jew, a Samaritan like himself or a foreigner; he did not know whether he had “brought that misfortune on himself” or not. The Gospel says: “When he saw him, he had compassion” (*Lk 10:33*). He saw him and had compassion. Others before him had also seen the man, but had continued on their way. The Samaritan did not ask himself so many questions, he followed the movement of compassion.

In our time too, we can encounter valid witness of people or institutions who work for peace and take care of those in need. Think, for example, of those who have received the Nobel Peace Prize, but also of the many unknown people who work silently for this cause.

Today I would like to recall *two witnesses*. The first is *Saint John XXIII*. He was called the “good Pope”, and also the “Pope of peace”, because in those difficult years of the early seventies, marked by strong tensions – the building of the Berlin Wall, the crisis in Cuba, the Cold War and the nuclear threat – he published the famous and prophetic Encyclical *Pacem in terris*. Next year will be its sixtieth anniversary, and it is very timely! Pope John addressed all men of good will, calling for the peaceful resolution of all wars through dialogue and disarmament. It was an appeal that received a great deal of attention in the world, far beyond the Catholic community, because it grasped a need of all humanity, which still exists today. This is why I invite you to read and study *Pacem in terris*, and to follow this path to defend and spread peace.

A few months after the publication of that Encyclical, another prophet of our time, *Martin Luther King*, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1964, delivered the historic speech in which he said: “I have a dream”. In an American context strongly marked by racial discrimination, he had made everyone dream with the idea of a world of justice, freedom and equality. He said: “I have a dream: that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character”.

And you, boys, girls: what is your dream for the world of today and tomorrow? I encourage you to dream big, like John XXIII and Martin Luther King. And therefore I invite you to participate, next year, in World Youth Day, which will take place in Lisbon. Those of you who can come will meet a great many other boys and girls from all over the world, all united by the dream of fraternity based on faith in God who is Peace, the Father of Jesus Christ and our Father. And if you cannot come in person, I invite you in any case to follow and to participate, because nowadays, with today’s media, this is possible.

I wish you all a good journey through the Advent season that we began yesterday: a journey made up of many small gestures of peace, every day: gestures of acceptance, of meeting, of understanding, of closeness, of forgiveness, of service... Gestures made with the heart, like steps towards Bethlehem, towards Jesus who is the King of peace, or rather, who is himself peace.

The poet Borges ends, or rather, does not end one of his poems with these words: “I want to give thanks... for Whitman and Francis of Assisi who already wrote this poem, for the fact that this poem is inexhaustible and mingles with the sum of creatures and will never reach the last verse and changes according to men”. May you too, boys and girls, accept the poet’s invitation to continue his poem, each one adding what he or she wants to thank him or her for. May each one of you become a “poet of peace”! Become poets of peace: do you understand? Poets of peace.

Thank you for coming! I bless you all from my heart. And please pray for me. Thank you.
