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Audience with the young people of Italian Catholic Action

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the young people of Italian Catholic Action.

The following is the Pope's address prepared for the circumstance, and handed to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear young people of ACR (*Acierre*), good morning and welcome!

It gives me great pleasure to meet you on this pre-Christmas occasion, so eagerly awaited and desired by you all. You come from different regions and are accompanied by the National President of Italian Catholic Action, Giuseppe Notarstefano, the General Assistant, Monsignor Gualtiero Sigismondi, the ACR leaders and your educators. I thank them for what they do and, through them, I want to say thank you to all those who work for your human and Christian growth.

To accompany you in this year of association, there are also words. Few, but strong. They are some words that Jesus says to his disciples, to each one of us: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (*Mt 28:19*). It is a request that the Lord makes to every Christian in every time. Jesus uses an easy and essential verb: "go". Some might think that to be a good Christian it is necessary above all to reflect, to meditate. Instead, Jesus says: Go! It is a decisive verb, because it transforms the disciple into an apostle, it makes him a missionary. And you too, dear friends, are called to go, because God does not like it when we are lazy on the couch; He wants us on the move, on our way, ready and willing to put ourselves on the line.

Go! But where, to whom? To others, towards – Jesus says in the Gospel – *all nations*, without excluding anyone. The Lord does not want us to spend our days closed up in ourselves. And this is a great risk for a boy or girl today: spending the days with a telephone screen in front of their eyes. No, our eyes were made for looking at those of others. They were not made to look down at a virtual world that we hold in our hands, but to raise our

eyes to heaven, to God, and to look those who live next to us in the eyes. Our look, our eyes are made to transmit the joy experienced from having met Jesus, that friendship that transforms existence, that makes us embrace life and enables us to discover its beauty. Because, boys and girls, it is beautiful to follow Jesus: it is beautiful to discover the great love he has for each one of us; it is beautiful to venture into the plan of happiness he has thought up for me, for you, for everyone; it is beautiful to discover the gifts he gives us with great generosity, the surprises that fill our lives with wonder and hope, that make us grow up free and happy.

But for this reason, it is necessary to go, and – take note – not to go alone, but together. Jesus tells all the disciples to *go* together, in the plural, not each one in isolation. To bear witness to Jesus' love, it is necessary to go out into the field not individually, but together, as a group. It is necessary, in other words, to form a team, to discover we are brothers and sisters in a world that tends to isolate us, to divide us, to pit us against each other; that says to you, "think of yourself and don't worry about others". Instead, the secret is precisely taking care of others. And in this way, one also takes care of oneself. One starts from here, from seeing in each person not an adversary, but a teammate, a child of God: this is the spirit with which to overcome indifference. This is what Jesus teaches us with his gaze, which is a gaze of predilection. For him, every person is important, but there are some he loves in a particular way. Do you know who they are? Not the rich and powerful, not those who are on the covers of glossy magazines or on television, but the smallest, the poor, the forgotten, the rejected, those no-one cares about. Thinking of them and of what they need, instead of what we are lacking, is the secret to making our world – which is in great need of peace – more beautiful, just and peaceful. And for this I rely on you, on your vision of the future, on your strength to go and above all on your prayer for peace, which is powerful and able to do great things!

We must not be afraid to take the field, to put ourselves on the line: "Go", Jesus tells you every day, "don't stop and never be afraid, because I will always be with you! Truly, He is always by our side, in good times and in sad times. The feast of Christmas, now close at hand, reminds us precisely this: that God enters the world and gives us the strength to go, to walk with him. At Christmas he joined us, he became our travelling companion. And he will never, ever abandon us. He looks forward to accompanying us in our affairs, in all the vicissitudes of life, to help us discover the meaning of the journey, the meaning of everyday life, to imbue us with courage in trials and in pain. To lift us up after every fall and protect us in the midst of every storm. Is it not beautiful to walk with such a God, with a God who is our friend, the Friend whom we can always trust?

So *go*, dear friends! The vivacity and talents that each one of you has – we all have them, no-one is without great talents, do not forget! - be available to all and bear fruit! I wish you, together with a Holy Christmas, to bear witness to this hope every day. And I extend my best wishes to your families and to the whole of Catholic Action. I bless you all from my heart; and I ask you a favour: do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
