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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the Astrophysics Summer School of the Vatican Observatory

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Astrophysics Summer School at the Vatican Observatory:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all and offer you my cordial good wishes as you take part in the Vatican Observatory Summer School. I also express my gratitude to the distinguished faculty who are guiding you in this experience.

All of us are fascinated by the great discoveries about the universe that astronomers are offering us in these days. We are amazed at the marvelous images sent from the new James Webb space telescope, and once the Vera Rubin Observatory becomes operative we expect to see how the universe continues to expand and change before our eyes. Above all, we are struck by the vastness of the universe, its enormous extent and the astonishing number of galaxies, stars and planets that have been identified.

Over two millennia ago, the Psalmist wrote, “When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?” (*Ps* 8:5). The immensity of the universe has always been a source of wonder for humanity. Its sheer size can be overwhelming, even frightening. As young scholars at the dawn of the 21st century, you seek in the course of this Summer School to grasp something of that vast expanse and to develop methods capable of better digesting and understanding the constant flow of new data.

You are in the process, then, of acquiring tools that can help you understand the universe. Yet all of us know that, even with the best of tools, the quality of their results depends on the wisdom and expertise of those who employ them. In science and in philosophy alike, we can be tempted to obtain only those responses that we

already expected, and not to let ourselves be surprised by new and unforeseen discoveries. My hope is that you will not remain content with the results of your research until you have also had the experience of being surprised. And even though you are looking at reality through the window of astronomy, be sure not to neglect the other windows that can show you other important realities, like compassion and love, realities that you are no doubt encountering also in the friendships that you are forming in these days.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about this universe is that it contains creatures like us, men and women who possess the ability to observe it with wonder and to “interrogate” it. Indeed, when the Psalmist asks, “What is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him”, he immediately goes on to say, “Yet you have made him little less than a God; with glory and honor you crowned him” (*Ps 8:5-6*).

May you never lose this sense of wonder, in your research and in your lives. May you be inspired always by the love for truth and awestruck by all that each fragment of the universe sets before you.

I offer you my best wishes for pleasant and fruitful days of study and friendship. I cordially bless you in whatever paths your work leads you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Rome, Gemelli Hospital, 15 June 2023

FRANCIS
