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Audience with the young people of Catholic Action

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

The following is the text of the Pope's greeting, handed out during the audience, and his impromptu address to those present:

Impromptu address

Thank you for this visit. Thank you for singing so joyfully. And thank you for your work. Do not lose your enthusiasm, do not lose your mystique. I wrote an address that I will not read now. You can take it with you. I will give it to you, to distribute. It is for you.

And thank you very much! Do not lose your joy. Now I would like to greet each one of you. But first, let us pray a little and ask for the blessing.

Greeting of the Holy Father (handed out)

Dear girls and dear boys of Catholic Action Youth: good morning!

Thank you for this visit, in which we exchange Christmas wishes. I greet the National President and the General Assistant, your leaders and educators, whom I thank for the care with which they accompany you on your journey of faith. Welcome!

Christmas reminds us that God loves us and wants to be with us. This is why Jesus was born, made himself

small, and lived in a family with Mary and Joseph, and continues to be present by our side and in each one of us: because He loves us, He is our friend. This is a wonderful gift. And it brings another one with it: that we too can love each other like brothers. How much we are in need of this today! So many peoples, so many young people suffer due to war!

By coming here, you wished to recall, with the symbol of the stars, your peers who died in these months due to fighting, and who like little lights watch us from heaven. Do you know how many children have died in Gaza in this latest war? More than three thousand. It is incredible, but it is the reality. And in Ukraine more than five hundred, and in Yemen, over years of war, thousands. Their memory invites us in turn to be lights for the world, to touch the heart of many people, especially those who can stop the whirlwind of violence. To love God and to love each other: only in this way can the world rediscover the light and peace it needs, as the angels sang in Bethlehem (cf. *Lk 2:14*). To love God and others: in the family, in the parish, at school and on the streets we travel every day, to help everyone believe that it is still possible to change direction, to choose life and to hope again.

And I would like to dedicate a last thought to a third love: first, to love *God*, second, to love *others*, and third, to love *creation*. I like the slogan of your association this year: "This is your home!". It helps you understand that God calls us to recognize and respect the beauty that surrounds us, in nature and in people, and in this way grow in sharing and fraternity. Live this journey with commitment: it too contains a message of hope.

Dear young people, at Christmas God shows us His love and invites us to love: Him, others and creation. Let us respond to his invitation by uniting heaven and earth in one big embrace, with our friendship and our tenderness. I wish you, your families and all Catholic Action a happy Christmas. I bless you and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
