The Holy See

"CHILDREN' S TRAIN 2018"

GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER

Paul VI Audience Hall Entrance
Saturday, 9 June 2018

[Multimedia]

Head teachers:

Good morning your Holiness, my name is Muraro Francesco and I am the head teacher of the Via Giacosa Comprehensive Institute, north-east Milan, Via Padova. I also present my colleagues…

Your Holiness, I am Milena Sozzi, director of the “Tommaso Grossi” Comprehensive Institute in the Molise-Calvairate neighbourhood, in the east of Milan.

Good morning your Holiness, I am Micaela Francisetti, and I am the director of the “Ilaria Alpi” Comprehensive Institute, in the south-west zone, Barona neighbourhood.

Good morning your Holiness, I am Milena Piscozzo, head teacher of the “Riccardo Massa” Comprehensive Institute in the north-west area of the city. And as directors of four schools in the outskirts of Milan, rather than speaking ourselves and explaining what the children want and what our neighbourhood is like, our children have prepared various surprises and will tell what our area is like, also with materials and items they have made, and important surprises just for you.

Your Holiness, if you may allow me to call you dear Pope Francis, thank you for this unrepeatable opportunity and for the enthusiasm we see in the eyes of our children. I am Rosa Maria, head teacher of a Comprehensive Institute of Prenestino-Collatino, Roma, “Giovambattista Valente”, a school in the peripheries that are so dear to you. Our pupils are colourful, very varied, made up of different ethnic groups, some Roma, foreigners, because the school has worked for inclusion for

many years, and to participate in this project has enabled us to think, to imagine a very colourful territory, like our school community. Therefore, I will leave space to our pupils who will show the works which include, in fact, a braid of coloured threads that represent how we work together, united in a very strong way, and I conclude, if I may, using the words that you address to the Church in your reflection [Exhortation] *Evangelii Gaudium*, which I would like to re-adapt to the school, to say that we prefer a school that gets dirty on the street rather than one which stays clean but closed up. Thank you.

Pope Francis, good morning. As you greet us from the window on Sunday, wishing us a good lunch, we too say “good morning” today. I speak for the “Antonio Gramsci” Comprehensive Institute, which is located in the outskirts of Rome, in Trullo, a zone that is particularly touched by integration and the capacity for welcome of our children and our families. There are 1,100 children, 1,100 families who have become one family, a single family with open arms to receive whoever should wish to arrive on our territory. The school works for this.

[Rhyme and song]

Anna:

My name is Anna Greta and I am from the school in Via Giacosa. I would like to ask you a question: do you remember what your teachers were like?

Pope Francis:

I went to school when I was six years old. The school was 400 metres from home, I used to go on foot, and I went there in the year 1942. Where were you in 1942? Ah, you were not yet here! The teacher was called Estela, a teacher I had in the first and third year, the same teacher. In the second and fourth I had another one. She was good, she taught us to read and write, very good. Then, always, when I left school, I always remembered her, because remembering your first teacher is very important, because he or she is the one who is the first to make you go ahead in life. And I used to call her on the telephone, as a boy and as a priest. And then as a bishop I helped her when she was ill. She died at the age of 94. And I always stayed in touch with her. That memory I will never forget. Thank you for your question.

Clara:

Good morning, my name is Clara and I would like to ask you: when you were a child, what was your neighbourhood like, and in which city did you live?

Pope Francis:

Thank you. May I say something? I lived in the most beautiful city in the world! In Buenos Aires, in the Flores quarter, which is one of the oldest quarters of the city, one of the first quarters. And I lived with my family, we were five brothers at home… And the area is a popular quarter, there were no high buildings, no, they were all low houses. In that time, there were few high buildings, few of them. The high buildings arrived later… It was a simple quarter, and thirty metres from our house there is a beautiful square where we used to play football. I was the goalkeeper. Do you know why I was the goalkeeper? Because when I played football, I was a "*pata dura*", a wooden leg. What does that mean? That I wasn't a great player and for that reason, since I didn't know how to move well, they put me there in goal and I managed to do it well! Thank you.

Malak:

My name is Malak, and I would like to ask you how you understood that you were to live the life you have lived, and how you have lived it.

Pope Francis:

I understood bit by bit, because first I studied as a chemist, and worked for four years as a chemist. And while I was studying, at the end of my career I worked in a laboratory, and I liked this. But at a certain point I understood that it did not fulfil me much, and I thought: we must do something for others, like a doctor… these things. And at the end, one day, the first day of spring in Argentina, 21 September – which is the opposite of your 21 September, which is the first day of Autumn – I felt in my heart that I had to become a priest: boom, a sudden blow. And then I continued to work for a few years, but I always kept this certainty, and then I entered the seminary. But I felt it all of a sudden. Thank you.

Giulia:

I am Giulia Vitale and I come from the "Ilaria Alpi" Comprehensive Institute. I would like to ask you what your school was like.

Pope Francis:

My school was in the street that was called "Varela"; it was a street of low houses, and the school had a red brick façade… And on the left there was a beautiful green square, but there we couldn't play football because it was all green with plants… beautiful. My house was 400 metres away and I always went on foot. A beautiful experience, I remember one 25 May… In May autumn starts in Argentina, and autumn was already well underway. But that year it was very cold in autumn and I went to school for a patriotic ceremony, because 25 May is the festival of our homeland. And when I went out I saw ice for the first time. In that time there was ice, today with warming we almost never see ice in the city, but in my time… At home there was simple heating, a single stove for all

the house, it was very simple, and there was ice on the street we took to go to school. Then school: we went in and there was a large, open space where we all gathered and had fun between one lesson and another, and the classrooms where the lessons were held were all around. And there we had an hour of school and ten minutes of recreation, in this garden. This is what school was like. And I went there a few years ago because there was a celebration to remember the first director of that school, whom I did not know, as he was before my time. And when I entered, the school was just as it was in my times, and this touched my heart, I liked it very much. Thank you.

Eiman:

My name is Eiman. What were your favourite games when you were a child?

Pope Francis:

We used to play a lot with the kite. We made it ourselves with canes and paper, lightweight paper. We made it ourselves. Then the cord… It is the game we liked the most. Then we liked football a lot. We also used to hold a football championship, all the boys in the neighbourhood, and also a kite-flying championship, who had the best one and which flew the highest. And that is how we played. Then, at carnival, we held a procession. All dressed up, but in many different things, each person dressed up as he or she wanted and we went along the streets singing and also ringing on doorbells of houses, singing, and asking for something to buy chocolate, our things… Carnival was nice in that time, where we were. And then in the evening we went on the biggest street in the neighbourhood, which was 600 metres from home, and there was the big carnival procession that involved the entire quarter, and there were adults and children; instead we little ones had our procession inside the neighbourhood… These were the games we played.

Jacopo:

My name is Jacopo, and I must ask: how did you feel when they chose you to be Pope?

Pope Francis:

This question is not original, everyone asks me! Here there is Cardinal [Ravasi], who was present at that moment… I heard that the Lord wanted me to work here, and I said: “Ahead”. I felt peace, this is the word, and it is not a lie, I have felt peace right up to this today.

Head teacher:

The children of Rome will now offer you a little memory and also an account of their work in their quarter, in their history. Mirko, come, Sara… Also the “Giovambattista Valente” school of Rome, if you would like to come here, we also have a choir…

Pope Francis:

Thank you, is this your work?

Head teacher:

Thank you, Your Holiness. We ask you to pray for us. All the school has asked for prayers, and your great blessing. Thank you.

[Song]

Head teacher:

I bambini hanno reinventato le parole di una canzone italiana di diversi anni fa che è “Il ragazzo della via Gluck”, milanese, così in questa sintesi possiamo unirci insieme e la canteranno adesso.

[Song]

Head teacher:

To show the great work that our boys and girls have done, we have some gifts from Milan; in particular we have taken in three dimensions the work they have done with their minds and their hands, a model of their neighbourhood and our beautiful school in a park. Together with this beautiful model, there is also a pair of other gifts that I think the teachers have nearby. Now I would ask our children and our teachers to move our gift, as others are arriving from the other schools.

I ask the “Riccardo Massa” to prepare the model and gifts for His Holiness… Your Holiness, this is the model of the Gallaratese quarter of Milan.

Model by the “Ilaria Alpi” Comprehensive Institute and the bread offered by the mothers of all the ethnic groups and all the cultures that are in our school.

Model by the “Tommaso Grossi” Institute of Milan, and the children with the gifts from the school of Via Monte Velino.

From the “Gramsci” School of Rome, the model and the drawings.

The “Giovambattista Valente” School of Rome.

[Song]

Pope Francis:

I thank you very much for the questions and for the gifts you have made. These things are wonderful, because you did not go to buy them somewhere, but you made them yourselves! Do you understand? And this is important, because you did this with intelligence, with your hands, but also with your heart. And when something is done with the three things, with intelligence, with the heart and with the hands, it is something profound and human. How can we make things? With what? Let us say it together: [the children repeat] intelligence, the heart and the hands.

I will say just a little thing, a little thing, I will ask you another question and then I will go and leave you in peace, all right? ["No!"] Ah, no? You do not want to be in peace? It is something I take from one of the questions that you have asked me: if I remembered my first teacher and school. Never forget your first teachers, never forget school. Why? Listen well. Because they are the roots of our culture. But what do we mean by roots? I will give you an example. Answer this question. A tree, if its roots are taken away, can it bear flowers? ["No!"] Are you sure? ["Sì!"] A tree without roots cannot bloom, and do we too as people have roots? Yes, spiritual roots, the home, family, school. This is why I say to you: do not forget school, because it is the root of your culture. And if a child, boy, a girl, forgets school, can he or she bear fruit in life? ["No!"] No! Can a boy or a girl without roots bear fruit in life? ["No!"] Or flowers? No! Roots. I will teach you a word that means what you must never be. Listen well, and learn: "I must not be uprooted". Have you learned? "Uprooted". What does uprooted mean? Without roots. I must not be uprooted, that is, without roots. And for this reason, remembering school, teachers, always in life, will help you maintain your roots, to bear flowers and fruit. This is what I wanted to say to you.

I say to you, thank you, many thanks for this beautiful meeting. It is all your work. And now I will say to you: for four years I have come with you, every year children here come by train, and let us say thank you to the *Ferrovia* which gives us the train, thank you, many thanks! Boys, girls, and children always ask me questions. Do you know what the most interesting question I have heard was?

Child:

If you remember your teachers…

Pope Francis:

This is very interesting. But there was another, more interesting… Do you want me to say? You all asked good quetsions, but now, towards the end, one of you in front of me said: "What time do they give you your lunch?" [Laughter]

I wish you a good lunch. May the Lord bless you. I embrace you all. Goodbye!

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