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Visit of the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome

Homily of the Secretary of State

Greeting to employees

The following are the texts of the homily and the greeting to employees pronounced yesterday by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin during his visit to the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome, for the exchange of Christmas greetings:

Homily of the Secretary of State

Dear brothers and sisters,

I adopt as my own the feeling of lively exultation present in today's liturgy and which we have shared in the prayer of the responsorial psalm, repeating several times: "*Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; … Sing to Him a new song*" to express to you the joy of being here today with you to celebrate this Eucharist in a moment of the year as special as the proximity to the great Christmas feast of the birth of the Lord Jesus.

First of all I want to greet the little ones and the young patients who are present here, and all those who for their health conditions cannot be here, hoping they will be able to return as soon as possible to their homes, fully recovered. I also cordially greet all their family members who accompany them anxiously in the hope of a positive outcome of the therapies in progress and who meanwhile support them with their attentions and their affection.

A grateful greeting goes to all the medical staff, nursing staff and to the various professional health figures who work together to offer every day the best possible care for those who are entrusted to their care with commitment, competence and humanity. I then greet the Religious, who work side by side with the health

workers, the volunteers who generously dedicate themselves to making the hospital environment more familiar, and the chaplains who with their pastoral charity contribute to making this place an evangelical "*healing community*", with at the centre the Lord Jesus, a physician of bodies and souls, present also today among us to benefit all those who find themselves in any kind of need.

Finally, together with all those gathered here for the occasion, I greet all the administrative staff, the Board of Directors and the President, Ms. Mariella Enoc, whom I thank both for the invitation to preside at this Eucharist and for the commitment in managing the Pope's hospital by combining apostolic and humanitarian aims with the health and organizational complexity of a modern hospital institution, as the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital is today.

The joy that echoes in the liturgy, which I mentioned a moment ago, reminds us that we are now at the end of Advent, a time in which the Church is preparing to celebrate the great event of the Incarnation, one of the principal mysteries of the Christian faith.

The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth, traditionally known as "the visitation" – which we have just heard in the Gospel – allows us to enter with humility and simplicity in this mystery, to be deeply involved in it. In the narration of Saint Luke, this episode is the meeting point of the history of Saint John the Baptist with that of Jesus. The first is the "precursor" who prepares the people for the coming of the Messiah; the second is the Messenger of God, the One Who "is stronger" than the prophet himself, Who will baptize "in the Holy Spirit and fire", the Saviour of humanity.

After the annunciation received from the Archangel Gabriel, Mary makes haste to meet Elizabeth, even though there are still three months to go before the birth of the Baptist. The Holy Virgin's concern is therefore not due to contingent reasons, but rather reveals to us what she is experiencing at that particular moment. In fact, in her soul different feelings overlap and intertwine, such as the emotion of the holy fear for the extraordinary nature of the event in which she was involved, joy at the fulfilment of the messianic promises, and the faith with which she abandoned herself to God's will.

In her condition, Mary faces this long and uncomfortable journey from the distant Nazareth, in Galilee, to Aim Karim, a small village in Judea, south of Jerusalem, to see for herself the sign that the Archangel Gabriel had indicated to her: "*And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God*" (*Lk* 1: 36). Elizabeth's motherhood is the confirmation that God is working in her, the confirmed proof of being "full of grace" (*Lk* 1: 28) and the "blessed among all women" (*Lk* 1:42) to become the Mother of the Saviour.

The meeting turns into a Pentecost *ante litteram*. The protagonist is indeed the Holy Spirit, Who in a virtuous circle through Mary's greeting first participates in the little John, who rejoices in the womb, and then in Elizabeth who prophesies: "*And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me*?". It is she who, under the action of the Spirit, makes us know the true and authentic meaning of all that is being silently realized from the moment of the annunciation onwards: Mary is the "blessed among women", because "the fruit of her womb" is "my Lord". After the exultation of John, who shares his mother's prophetic charism as precursor, the Spirit eventually returns to Mary, who magnifies God as her "*Saviour, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant*", for all this gaze on His humble servant will mean for the whole world, in every moment of history.

Even today, Mary comes to us to bring us the Saviour. And Saint Elizabeth's amazement becomes our amazement: "*And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me*?". In the same way Mary accompanies us to the grotto of Bethlehem where, to our amazement, she will hold in her arms Jesus, the Son of God.

Here is how and where our Advent journey ends. Here is what it means to "prepare for Christmas": to be ready to welcome the Saviour in our arms, conquered by so much love from Mary's maternal and immaculate heart. Let us allow ourselves to be taken by the hand by the humble "handmaid of the Lord". She will lead us with certainty to the One Who is our Saviour.

These reflections of mine are not a yielding to the goodwill of these days, nor an impromptu promotion of the festival of good feelings to which those who wish to avoid the danger of being compelled to faith before the mystery we are about to celebrate, prefer to adapt.

Through these images full of tenderness and amazement I intend to focus my and your attention on what I believe to be the only possible attitude to adopt at Christmas, the humble and trusting abandonment of Mary to the will of God.

An exemplary and fundamental attitude for every Christian, and more important and necessary than ever also for all those who have chosen the profession of the care and assistance of the sick, so as to avoid their effort becoming a merely technical exercise, to subtract oneself from the discomfort of ethical and spiritual responsibilities and, more generally, the human meaning of their action.

I say this above all to you, workers in this Hospital in which, along with the scientific and technical excellence with which every day you treat your little patients, which I acknowledge with great gratitude, aside from personal convictions, you have to remain aware that your work is an expression, not secondary, of the mercy and charity of the Holy Father, and therefore of his own apostolic ministry.

For this reason I hope you will allow yourselves to be permeated by the joy of Christmas, not so much as a momentary escape from the burden and greyness of daily life, but rather as Saint Paul VI reminds us in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, as a sign of our progressive transfiguration in the image and semblance of the "new Adam" (cf. *I Cor* 15: 45), whose birth we are about to celebrate.

Indeed, the Holy Pontiff states in that document, "*God's joy is knocking at the door of their physical and moral sufferings* [of the sick], *not indeed with irony, but to achieve therein His paradoxical work of transfiguration*" (§ V). May it be thus also for all of you.

To the little and young patients and their relatives, I bring the wishes of the Holy Father Francis, as he expressed them in last Wednesday's general audience: "*Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a happy Christmas, a Christmas rich in the surprises of Jesus. (At times) They may seem to be uncomfortable surprises but they are God's tastes. If we espouse them, we too we offer ourselves a splendid surprise. Each one of us has, concealed in his heart, the capacity to surprise. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by Jesus this Christmas*" … because the surprises of Jesus are anyway always full of His love and of that hope that never disappoints (cf. *Rom* 5: 5).

May it be thus.

Greeting to employees

I reiterate to all of you present here and all the community of the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital the greetings I expressed during the Holy Mass we have just celebrated.

I am here, like every year, to bring you wishes: fervent and cordial wishes for a happy Christmas and a serene New Year. May the Lord Jesus Who is born for us in Bethlehem fill you with joy and peace, console those who suffer pain in their heart and realize the good wishes you carry within! I extend this wish to your families and all those dear to you.

Our hospital is dedicated to the Baby Jesus: a splendid intuition on the part of the founders, encouraged from the outset by the blessing of Pope Pius IX. We can therefore say that every day is a little like Christmas here.

Celebrating the Baby Jesus on the day of His birth reminds us of the dual call to be answered.

First, there is the call to our main mission, which is to provide service to sick children, especially the most fragile. We are aware that care demands constant commitment to research and continuous investment to respond to levels of excellence. Our challenge is to offer adequate treatment to all, even to those whose conditions are incurable, because everyone has the right to a dignified life, even if it is brief.

I think, in this context, of the structural investments that have seen, and will see the growth of the Hospital, so as to offer more complete therapeutic pathways: work for the strengthening of Sant'Onofrio and of Palidoro, the realization of Villa Luisa and of the centre of Villa Pamphili, the seat of Palazzo Alicorni. The different structures indicate the richness of a community that is careful to grow, considering all the system and not just one dimension.

Through the little patients we place ourselves at the service of the Baby Jesus, the Son of God who trusted us so much as to place Himself in our hands: in the hands of Mary, in the hands of Joseph, in the hands of all of us.

I would like our work in this hospital, precisely because it is the Pope's Hospital, never to lose sight of, or indeed to give first place to, what I would call "supernatural motivations". This does not mean suppressing the "human motivations", such as for instance work, salary, the realization of one's own professional aspirations, etc. These form part of our humanity. It does not therefore mean denying them, but living them in a certain way, with a certain style, in a dimension of service, disinterest and self-giving, which is at the heart of the Gospel. I would like all of us, from those who manage this institution to those who carry out the most humble tasks – although in the eyes of God there are no roles that are more or less important, as all depends on the correct intention, the honesty and the love with which things are done – to ask ourselves always, before taking any decision or carrying out any action, if we are truly making an effort to put the Gospel into practice.

And this brings us to the second call. The Gospel tells us that the Son of God came to dwell with all men, because every person is the object of His infinite love, but in particular the "last" of the earth. They are represented by the shepherds, who were the first to welcome the announcement of the Angel and who moved to meet the Child of Bethlehem. We can not forget this important indication of Christmas, which reminds us of our task of "going out towards the last". I am pleased, therefore, that the Hospital is striving to open up to the suburbs, in harmony with Pope Francis' invitation to be a hospital for the children of the world.

This Christmas we approach an important stage in your journey: the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the oldest paediatric hospital in Italy. It is a particularly meaningful passage, which should help us gratefully recall the past, so as to live the present with intensity and to enter the future with courage and hope. Memory, in fact, is the baggage that people need to go beyond themselves towards new horizons. Memory, combined with discernment, provides the awareness that there are challenges, obstacles, difficulties and even dramas, which so often seem superior to our humble forces, but that if the Lord is with us we will have nothing to fear. And the Lord is with us, He is Emmanuel. With the prophet Isaiah we repeat: *Comfort, comfort, my people: soon your Saviour will come. Why do you consume yourself in sadness? Why are you assailed by suffering? I will save you, do not fear: I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer!*

With these words I reiterate my wishes for a Merry Christmas and a serene New Year, and we will meet again on 19 March to celebrate the 150th birthday of the Hospital.

Thank you.