



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Message of the Holy Father Francis to participants in the International Conference on Sport and Spirituality “Putting life into play” (Rome, 16-18 May 2024)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to participants in the International Conference on Sport and Spirituality, entitled “Putting life into play”, organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Embassy of France to the Holy See:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I warmly greet you who participate in the International Conference on Sport and Spirituality, entitled “Putting life into play”, organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education and by the French Embassy to the Holy See.

Several times, the Apostle Paul compared the spiritual life to sporting activity, in particularly running (cf. *1 Cor* 9:24; *2 Tm* 4:7-8), in which the prize is Christ Himself. The discipline and temperance of athletes, as well as the healthy competition, have often been valued as a metaphor for the virtuous Christian life. Today too this metaphor can be effective for all those who, in some way, wish to and strive to please God and to be His friends.

Sport is assuming an increasingly important role in society, shaping the daily life of many people. It is a way of spending free time that inspires interests and opportunities to meet, brings people together, creates communities, dynamizes life in an ordered way and promotes dreams, especially in the younger generations.

This is why there is a need for a pastoral care of sport and education in the genuine values of competition, purified of selfishness and merely material interests. For the same reason, it is important for the Church to reflect on the sporting experience and to make the most of it in her evangelizing action. Those who are involved in this service are required to act in a way that proposes Jesus as a “God’s true athlete” (Saint John Paul II, *Homily on the Jubilee of sportspeople*, 29 October 2000). Some recent pontifical pronouncements have enriched ecclesial

reflection on sport, locating it within its human horizon, warning against the risks of dehumanization and corruption, and promoting it as a privileged place of encounter between people and fraternity between peoples.

In this context, this Conference on Sport and Spirituality proposes to think of “sport beyond sport”. With a multi-faceted outlook, it intends to explore its ethical, social, cultural, political and spiritual values. I wish the best outcome for your work, and allow me to leave you an indication that is very close to my heart: in sport, at all levels, the “amateur” spirit, which preserves its genuineness, should never be missing. And this style is closely linked to the quality of the spiritual life of those who form the sports environment: managers, coaches, technicians and athletes. I emphasize in this regard the great educational responsibility of adults: their conscience, formed in human values, is decisive in giving life to healthy and formative sporting environments, preventing all educationally harmful attitudes and all forms of abuse, especially to the detriment of minors and the most vulnerable.

Thank you for your commitment, I assure you of my prayers, and I invoke the Lord’s blessing upon all of you and upon your respective activities.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 24 April 2024

FRANCIS
