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Audience with the Italian National Youth Council

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian National Youth Council, to whom the Holy Father delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I greet the president – it is you! (*the Pope addresses the president, who answers, “Yes”*) and all of you of the Italian National Youth Council. I am happy to meet you on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of this entity: a milestone that becomes an opportunity to continue to work with confidence, before youth goes away.

Hope does not disappoint! Hear this well: hope does not disappoint. Never. With these words I called for the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025. I was pleased to read in your “Confidence Index Survey” that hope is the inner attitude with which young Italians today most identify. We often meet people who are discouraged because they look at the future with scepticism and pessimism. Those people (with the) long face, like this ... pessimism. It is therefore important to know that young Italians know how to be artisans of hope because they are capable of dreaming. Please do not lose the ability to dream: when a young person loses this ability, I am not saying that he becomes old, no, because old people dream. He becomes “retired from life”. It is very bad. Please, young people, don't retire from life, and don't let hope be stolen from you! Never! Hope never disappoints!

In dialogue with the institutions, you are the consultative body called upon to represent the world of youth at local, national and European level. And to this end, you must promote the active participation of young people by “networking” among the many associations inspired by values such as solidarity and inclusion. By “networking”, but also by making noise. This is very important. In this task - of “networking” and “making noise” - I invite you to be a voice for everyone, especially for those who have no voice. And today there are so many people who have no voice, so many who are excluded, not only socially, because of the problems of poverty, lack of education, the tyranny of drugs... but also of those who do not know how to dream. Network in order to dream, and do not

lose this ability. Dream.

As we know – also from the news in these days – the challenges you face are many: the dignity of work, the family, education, civic engagement, care for creation and new technologies. The increase in acts of violence and self-harm, up to the most extreme gesture of taking one's own life, are signs of a worrying and complex malaise. You know that, in the world, youth suicides are not all published, they are hidden. It is a change of era, a metamorphosis not only cultural but also anthropological. This is why an educational path involving everyone is fundamental. I can say that we need a 'village of education' where, in diversity, we share a commitment to generate a network of human and open relationships. What is needed is a pact, an alliance, between those who wish to put the person at the centre and, at the same time, are willing to invest new energy in the training of those who will serve the community.

You are called to be witnesses to the beauty and newness of life. There is a beauty that goes beyond appearances: it is that of every man and woman who live out their personal vocation with love, in selfless service to the community, in generous work for the happiness of the family, in unselfish commitment to making social friendship grow. Discovering, showing and highlighting this beauty means laying the foundations of social solidarity and the culture of encounter. Your selfless service for truth and freedom, for justice and peace, for the family and politics is the most beautiful and most necessary contribution you can make to the institutions for building a new society. And this is not done with ideas; it is done with human capabilities, all our capabilities, without forgetting the extremes of life. There are two things I will leave with you as questions: some of you, you are married, you have children – do you know how to play with your children? Are you capable of "wasting" time to play with your children, or with your grandchildren? "Because even if God does not give children, the devil gives grandchildren". Are you capable of this? This ability to play. And then, another question: are you capable of caressing an elderly person? Playing with children, and caressing the elderly. And today, in our culture, children are left to grow up alone, without tenderness, and the elderly are sent to rest homes, to die there. We must change: play with children, and caress the elderly. And this will make your youth fruitful. Do not forget this: children and the elderly.

Allow me, finally, to say the most important thing to you, that truth that for a Christian must never be silenced. It is a proclamation that concerns everyone, young and old, and which we always need to hear again: "God loves you, you know", "God loves you", "Christ saves you", "He lives!". If He lives, then hope is not in vain. Evil, pessimism, and scepticism will not have the last word. And so many young people fall prey to this scepticism, also sustained by drugs. At the start of being Christian there is not an ethical decision or a grand idea, but the encounter with a Person, it is the encounter with Jesus, who gives life a new horizon. Hope, the state of mind in which today Italians most identify themselves, for us Christians as a name and a face: the face of the Lord, the face of Jesus.

Faced with the challenges and the difficulties you may encounter in your work, do not fear! Do not be afraid to go through conflicts too. Conflicts make us grow. But do not forget that conflict is like a labyrinth: you cannot get out of the labyrinth alone, you get out in the company of someone else who helps you. First. And from the labyrinth you get out from above. Let others help you. And always look up so that life is not a labyrinthine ride that kills youth. To grow old in a labyrinth is to grow old in superficial values. It is sad to see a man or a woman, young, living (their) life in superficiality. It is very sad... It is necessary in life also to go through conflicts. You need the patience to transform them into the ability to listen, to acknowledge the other, to grow together. Trying to overcome conflicts is a sign that we have aimed higher, higher than our self-interest, to get out of the quicksand of social enmity. Go ahead in your service: seek, safeguard and bring the voice and hope of young Italians to institutional venues to participate together for the common good.

I entrust you to Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. Do you know him? As I child I heard talk of him because my father was a companion of Catholic Action. He was a young man like you, who bore witness with his life to the joy of the Gospel. I invite you to get to know him and to imitate his consistency and his courage, his joy. I wish you all a good journey, and good work! Thank you for your visit. I bless you from my heart, and please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

