



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE LEADERS AND ATHLETES OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

*Vatican Basilica
Friday, 19 December 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Friends of the CONI,

I address my cordial greeting to all of you, and I thank the President for his gracious words. In our era, sport is right at home in the Church, and this meeting proves it: we are celebrating together your centenary, an important anniversary for Italian sport. For 100 years the Italian National Olympic Committee has promoted, organized, led sport in Italy, not only with regard to great world events such as the Olympics, but also by enhancing its popular, social, educational and cultural aspects. It does so by drawing inspiration from the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, which, among its main principles, poses the centrality of the person, the harmonious development of humankind, the defense of human dignity, and also that of contributing “to building a peaceful and better world, without war or tension, by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind... with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play (International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, n. 6).

Sport has always favoured universality characterized by fraternity and friendship among peoples, understanding and peace among nations, out of respect, tolerance, harmony of differences. Every sporting event, especially those of the Olympics, where representatives of nations with histories, cultures, traditions, faiths and different values meet, can become a channel of an ideal force capable of opening new and sometimes unexpected paths in the resolution of conflicts arising from human rights violations.

The Olympic motto — “*Citius, altius, fortius*” — is not an incitement to the supremacy of one nation over another, of one people over another, or even of the exclusion of the weakest and least protected. But it represents the challenge to which we are all called, not only the athletes: that of taking on the toil, the sacrifice, to reach life’s important goals, accepting one’s limitations without

allowing oneself to be impeded by them but striving to excel.

I invite you to persevere on this path. I encourage the educational work you are doing in schools, as well as that in the world of work, and that of solidarity, in order to foster sport accessible to all, attentive to the weakest and the most vulnerable strata of society; sport inclusive of people with varying disabilities, of foreigners, of those who live on the outskirts and who need places to meet, socialize, share and play; sport not aimed at profit but at development of the human person, in an open manner.

I know that the CONI, first, increasingly imitated by other National Committees, has welcomed the position of Olympic Chaplain into its organization. It is a friendly presence who seeks to make manifest the closeness of the Church as well as to stimulate a strong sense of spiritual competitiveness in sport enthusiasts. There are indeed several words in the vernacular of sport which refer to spiritual life. This was even understood by the Saints who knew how to explain passion, enthusiasm, perseverance, determination, challenge and limitation with the gaze projected toward the other, beyond oneself toward the horizon of God. St Paul invites us to train “in godliness;... for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8).

Dear friends, I wish you all good things for your service. Best wishes also for Rome’s candidacy to host the 2024 Olympic Games. I won’t be here! May the Lord bless all of you and your families. Please remember to pray for me. Happy Christmas!