



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOOTBALL GAME OF THE WORLD ROM ORGANIZATION**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 20 November 2021*

[Multimedia]

*Dear Rom friends,
Dear brothers and sisters!*

I welcomed with joy the proposal of the World Rom Organization to play a football match here, in Rome, with a “Pope’s team”, which is made up of cardinals: that is, a Vatican squad.

In fact, the team with which - and not “against” which - you will play tomorrow represents a style of sporting passion lived with solidarity and gratuitousness, with an amateur and inclusive spirit. You will be playing alongside some Swiss Guards, priests working in offices of the Roman Curia, Vatican employees and some of their children.

On the pitch - wearing a shirt bearing the words “*Fratelli tutti*” - there will also be a young footballer with Down’s syndrome, a member of the “*Special Olympics*”, and three migrants. These, after a journey marked by abuse and violence, which saw them pass from the Greek camp of Lesbos and then to Italy, have been welcomed by the Sant’Egidio Community and are living an experience of integration. Thank you all for agreeing to be part of the “Pope’s team”! It is a team where there are no barriers and which makes inclusion the simple normality. It makes inclusion the simple normality: this is clear. I thank the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Ravasi, for this concrete action of witness in the world of sport, especially through “*Athletica Vaticana*”, which lives this mission of service among sportsmen and women every day.

Dear Roma friends, I am familiar with your history, your reality, your fears and your hopes. That is

why I encourage with particular affection the project “Un calcio all'esclusione” (“Give exclusion the boot”), launched by the diocese of Rome, so that this match does not remain just an isolated event. I greet Bishop Ambarus, the auxiliary in charge of pastoral care among the Roma, accompanied by the boys from the oratory of the parish of *San Gregorio Magno alla Magliana*. Thanks also to you, boys, and best wishes because I know that tomorrow you will be the first to take to the field in a preparatory match with your Lazio peers. And thanks to the Lazio club, which is kindly and generously hosting and supporting this initiative.

On 14 September in Košice, Slovakia, [I visited the Roma community](#). I invited people to move away from prejudice to dialogue, from closure to integration. After listening to the testimonies of some members of the community - stories of pain, redemption and hope - I reminded everyone that to be Church is to live “as a people called by God, each with his or her special role to play, to be part of the same team”. I used precisely these expressions, taken from the language of football, which also fit in very well with the meaning of your match. All too often, I told the Roma people of Košice, “you have been the object of prejudice and harsh judgments, discriminatory stereotypes, defamatory words and gestures. As a result, we are all poorer, poorer in humanity”.

For this reason, the sporting event you will be organising has great significance: it shows that the way to peaceful coexistence is integration. And the basis is the education of children. Dear Roma friends, I know that in Croatia you give life to many sporting initiatives of inclusion, to help mutual knowledge and friendship. It is a sign of hope! Because children's great dreams cannot break against our barriers. Children, all children, have the right to grow up together, without obstacles and without discrimination. And sport is a place of encounter and equality, and can build community through bridges of friendship.

Thank you for this visit! I wish you a good game. It doesn't matter who scores the most goals, because you score the decisive goal together, the goal that wins hope and gives a kick to exclusion. Thank you all!

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