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Audience with Members of the Vatican Amateur Sports Association

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the "Sport in the Vatican" Amateur Association, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the president for his words, and I greet you all, who work in various areas of the Roman Curia and Vatican City State, and are also athletes, members of the "Sport in the Vatican" Amateur Association. On this occasion we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Vatican Football League, organized for the first time in 1972. From those first experiences, and even earlier from the distant 1521 when the first match of Florentine football was played in the Courtyard of the Belvedere, in the presence of Pope Leo X, we have arrived at the current Association, which includes other sporting disciplines.

During the various championships, as when you travel for solidarity events, you are required to bear witness to your link with the Holy See. Therefore, I would like to reflect with you, starting out from that image used by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians, where he says: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners complete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (9:24-25). Saint Paul, again, in the Letter to the Philippians, adds: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (3:12). These two passages enable us to interpret healthy competition as an activity that can contribute to the maturation of the spirit. In particular, they outline three fundamental rules for the athlete: training, discipline, and motivation.

First of all, *training*. Our thought turns first to *effort* – training takes effort – to sweat, to sacrifice. At the basis of this there is the passion for one's own sport. A gratuitous passion, that which we call "*amateur*", which expresses

precisely the love for a certain activity. In Italian we say "*dilettante*", which has assumed an at times reductive meaning, but which derives from "*diletto*", that is, the pleasure with which one carries out an activity. And if there is this attitude, then competition is healthy; otherwise, interests of various types prevail, the competition is damaged, and at times it is even corrupted. Amateurism is decisive in sport!

Then there is *discipline*, which is an aspect of education, of formation. A disciplined athlete is not merely one who observes the rules. Certainly, this is important, it must be. But discipline recalls "disciple", that is, one who wants to learn, who does not feel he has "arrived" and is able to teach everyone. The true sportsperson always seeks to learn, to grow, to improve. And this demands, precisely, discipline, which is capacity for self-mastery, to correct the impulsiveness that we all have, more or less. Discipline then enables each person to play his or her role, and the team to express the best of the whole.

Finally, *motivation*. Saint Paul writes: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7). It is the perfect seal of adherence to the call, also for a sportsperson. In a competition, it is motivation, that is, inner strength, that gives the impetus that leads to a good result. The test is not on the numerical result, but how faithful we were and how consistent with our calling. And, speaking of motivation, I would like to add something for you who are the Vatican sportspeople: your way of being a team and of collaborating can set an example for the work in the Dicasteries and between the Dicasteries of the Curia, as well as in the Directorates of Vatican City State. Once again, sport is a metaphor for life.

Dear friends, I thank you for this visit and I urge you to keep going. I bless you and your loved ones from my heart. And, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
