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CHURCH AND SPORT SECTION SEMINAR

“Coaches: educating people”

Rome, 14-15 May 2015

MASS

Introduction

As we come to the end of today’s full programme, we bring to the altar the fruit of our reflection made together on the theme of the Seminar: “Coaches: educating people”. The Eucharist enables us to fully grasp the importance of an educator’s mission, especially that of a Christian educator. Each Mass speaks to us of the immense value and dignity of every human person, and this can only be explained by the cross and resurrection of Christ. Saint John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: “How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he ‘gained so great a Redeemer’ [...] that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News” (no.10).

I think therefore that the main objective of this seminar is precisely to awaken in us this wonder, for without it we cannot really educate the younger generation.

In order to worthily celebrate these holy mysteries, we prepare our hearts through an act of sincere repentance for our sins:

* Lord, you who were sent by the Father to save the contrite of heart, have mercy on us!

Kyrie eleison...

* Christ, you came to call sinners, have mercy on us!

Christe

* Lord, you intercede for us to the Father, have mercy on us!

Kyrie

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

A lesson from Saint Matthias apostle...

1. Today the Church is celebrating the feast of Saint Matthias apostle. His story, we remember, is very unusual and different from that of the other apostles. To replace Judas Iscariot, the traitor, the eleven apostles gathered in prayer under the guidance of Peter and cast lots to choose between two candidates. The lot fell to Matthias, and he joined the eleven apostles. We remember the beautiful prayer that accompanies the election of Matthias: “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs” (Acts 1:24-25). This is how Saint Matthias became the twelfth apostle, a witness to the resurrection of Christ. According to tradition, he proclaimed the Gospel first in Judea and then in Ethiopia where he was martyred in the year 50 or so.

2. The story of Saint Matthias apostle helps us to understand better the meaning of the word vocation: a vocation accepted and lived out with fidelity even to the shedding of blood, unlike Judas who betrayed Jesus. Our vocation is very important in each person’s life. For us Christians, life itself is a vocation in the sense that God’s call to life has a unique and original plan for each one of us □ a plan of love. As a person, I am not the result of pure chance. God meant me to be right from the beginning of eternity. We are all called to discover this plan of love and to adhere to it freely. Of course, this is not an easy task. It requires deep discernment that involves all of our lives. It is a task that presents itself with particular intensity for young people. They have to discover that their life is a vocation from God, and they must respond to that call with a great sense of responsibility. The task of educators comes in here □ parents, teachers, and also the coaches! They have to accompany young people in a way that can help them to discover their vocation and to make the important choices in life. In our time, this has become an extremely difficult mission. This is because of the widespread educational crisis of which Pope Benedict XVI spoke often. With so many anthropological shifts and the current relativistic thinking, it is extremely difficult to convey to the younger generations the basic values and rules of life. Postmodernity is causing people to be confused and lost, extremely fragile and desperate for true teachers and reliable guides who unfortunately are scarce. The mission of an educator today has become very difficult and more than ever requires authentic witness of life. Blessed Paul VI said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41).

3. Coaches, then, must be both teachers and witnesses for young people who are entrusted to their care. They are witnesses and educators who help the people entrusted to them to grow, not only in the skills of a given sport at competitive level, but also and especially in humanity. It is not enough to produce “one-dimensional” champions or “human machines” who can win titles and medals. We must never lose

sight of the fact that behind each young athlete there are men and women with problems, concerns and fragility. Sport in its various disciplines is a school that is important in conveying so many human virtues. It teaches us to be demanding on ourselves, to set high targets to be achieved, to be able to challenge ourselves and our limits. Sport keeps us from the temptation of giving in to comfortable mediocrity that is always lurking around. Let us not forget that Saint Paul compares the Christian life to a race. It is the passionate race of one who is not content to win a fleeting accolade (as in sports competitions), but the prize of eternal life.

Coaching is not a job like others. Rather, it is a real mission, that of educating, training and helping people to grow in every way □ including the transcendent. It is a mission that often requires the courage to go against the dominant culture of our time. The sports world today more than ever needs coaches like this. Let us pray to the Lord in this Eucharist to increase the number of coaches who know how to be really wise educators of the young people in their care.