

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN TENNIS FEDERATION**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 8 May 2015*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

I thank you for coming, and in such numbers! I thank the President for his courteous words. A special greeting goes to the children present -- there are so many! -- who are taking part in a [ludic-motor] project organized by the Italian Tennis Federation.

On several occasions I have talked of sport as an educational experience. Today I wish to confirm it: sport is an educational path! There are three paths, three fundamental pillars for children, for youngsters and young people: school and family education, sport and work – school and family education, sport and work. One grows well on these three pillars! When all three are there, school, sport and work, then the conditions exist to develop a full and genuine life, thus avoiding those dependencies that poison and ruin one's existence.

The Church is interested in sport because man is at her heart, the whole man, and she recognizes that sports activity affects the formation, relations and spirituality of a person.

You, athletes, have a mission to fulfill: to be able to be, for those who admire you, valid models to imitate. And you also, sports directors, trainers and workers, are called to give good witness of human values, masters of a sports practice that is always loyal and limpid.

Yours is a very competitive sport, but the pressure to be able to obtain significant results must never drive you to take a short cut as happens in the case of doping. How awful and sterile is that victory that is obtained cheating the rules and deceiving others!

The Apostle Paul uses the example of an athlete to illustrate an important characteristic of human existence and he says this: “Do you know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!” (1 Corinthians 9:24). In a certain sense, this is your daily experience in tennis. However, Saint Paul is referring to the challenge of giving an ultimate meaning to life itself. Therefore, I would like to exhort each one of you to get involved not only in sport -- as you already do and with optimum results --, but in life, in the search for the good, the true good, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm. Get involved with others and with God, giving the best of yourselves, spending your life for what really is worthwhile and lasts forever. Put your talents at the service of the encounter between persons, of friendship, of inclusion.

Dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to take my greetings to your families and friends. May Almighty God bless you and protect you always and, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Now we will all pray together to Our Lady before giving you the blessing. (Hail Mary)