

DICASTERY FOR LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE
DICASTERY FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT

“Sport for all – cohesive, accessible and tailored to each person”
(Rome, 29-30 September 2022)

WORDS OF INTRODUCTION BY CARDINAL FARRELL

“The Church, the moral good of humanity and sport”

I cordially greet all the leaders and delegates of sports and inter-governmental institutions and organisations, the representatives of Christian denominations and of other religions, the leaders of sports clubs, the coaches, the athletes present in this hall, and all the other participants at this sports summit.

Allow me to say a few words to explain the significance of this initiative sponsored jointly by two Dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Some might ask why the Church is gathering the world of sport to a meeting here. What is the motivation? What is the relationship between the religious dimension and the practice of sport, which in itself is secular and non-confessional? These are legitimate questions. The effort to answer them also helps those who work in the service of the Church to focus on our mission and on the contribution we want to make to the international community.

It is obviously not our intention to go into the regulations of your institutions and organisations. As a Church, as a community of believers, we have no wish to give practical guidance on how to organise international federations, or on how to finance your activities, or on the regulations of tournaments in the various disciplines, or on how to manage the teams involved in the various sports, or on how to guide athletes in individual competitions. This is not our task.

We are moved by an inner motivation. I will try to illustrate what it is by referring to a document written by Pope Francis, one about which I think you have heard; it is the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* on fraternity and social friendship. Let me quote an excerpt from it:

“The New Testament describes one fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal 5:22*) as *agathosyne*; the Greek word expresses attachment to the good, pursuit of the good. Even more, it suggests a striving for excellence and what is best for others, their growth in maturity and health, the cultivation of values and not simply material wellbeing. A similar expression exists in Latin: *benevolentia*. This is an attitude that ‘wills the good’ of others; it bespeaks a yearning for goodness, an inclination towards all that is good and excellent, a desire to fill the lives of others with what is beautiful, sublime and edifying” (FT 112).

This is what drives the Church as a community and each of us individually as disciples of Jesus. The Spirit of God given to us by Jesus urges us to desire the well-being of other people. However, the Pope Francis makes it clear that it is not just a matter of other people’s material well-being, but what is best for them, what helps them to be more human and therefore happier. It is ultimately about the moral good of the individual and of humanity. This is also the title of a section of the encyclical, no. 112, from which I have taken the title of my talk. The Church feels the desire to work for the moral good of humanity, and sport can also contribute to this. The Pope says in number 112:

“seeking and pursuing the good of others and of the entire human family also implies helping individuals and societies to mature in the moral values that foster integral human development” (FT 112).

The Church is concerned with the ‘integral human development’ of individuals and societies, which is not limited to economic prosperity, but embraces many other dimensions of life.

The first point is this: the Church cares about the good of the person, and sport, when lived well and presented in a correct manner, especially to young people, can make a very valuable contribution to the good of the human person. In the view of the Church, sport is for the good of the person, not the person for the good of sport. Sport – just like art, economics or politics – is not an absolute. It is at the service of the person. It must serve to foster his or her ‘integral good’, which includes the individual and social dimensions, the physical and psychological dimensions, and the aspiration to not only obtain personal victories but also the achievement of collective goals.

A second question is: what does the Church expect from sport? What specific contribution can sport make to a person’s well-being? Let me quote again from *Fratelli Tutti*:

“In today’s world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. This illusion, unmindful of the great fraternal values, leads to “a sort of cynicism [...] Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes” (FT 30).

The chapter from which this excerpt is taken is entitled “Globalisation and progress without a shared roadmap”. Our world has made great strides on the road to globalisation, especially on an economic and commercial level, but there is no clear vision of a common goal. We share so many goods, so many products, so many results of scientific and technical progress, but we struggle to share a higher purpose that unifies all these efforts. Where are we going in our globalised world? Where do we want to go? Sometimes we can get the impression that everyone is taking advantage of globalisation for individualistic ends and not in view of a common good. We have lost sight of the ‘other’, of putting ‘us’ before ‘me’, that is, the good of all those collective settings in which we are embedded: from the local community to the nation and all the way to the whole of humanity. We have particularly lost sight of those who have been left behind, those who have not been able to benefit from globalisation, those who are weaker and in need. That is why, in the passage I have just quoted, Pope Francis speaks of “globalised indifference”, an expression similar to the one he has used in various speeches and which has become very well known: “the globalisation of indifference”. In the quoted passage, the Holy Father also explains that this “cold and globalised indifference” come from disillusionment. People no longer believe in the great ideals of universal fellowship, or that we all belong to the same humanity, or in a commitment to build justice and peace together. In the 1960s and 1970s these were ideals that were very much in vogue and very much felt, especially by young people, and this stimulated the efforts made by many international organisations. All of this seems to have been lost today. The Pope speaks of a sort of withdrawal into oneself and of ‘cynicism’ that has taken possession of souls. He says that if we want to restore hope and to bring about renewal, we must focus on coming together and on the culture of encounter.

Herein lies the motivation for this symposium and the Church’s interest in sport. The Church feels driven by the desire to rekindle hope in the hearts of

people, especially the most disadvantaged, and wishes to promote togetherness and a culture of encounter in every field. Given the importance that sport has attained in our societies, it can be a privileged domain in which to foster the togetherness and the culture of encounter. “Togetherness” and “encounter” summarise well the underlying motivation that moves us. They underpin the three key words that you will hear often repeated at this summit. We will talk about ‘tailored’ sport that is made to measure for each person. This creates togetherness and encounter for people with physical and mental disabilities and psychological problems. We will talk about ‘accessible’ sport to foster togetherness and encounter in the practice of sport for those who live in situations of poverty and hardship due to immigration, exclusion, wars, and imprisonment. Finally, there will be talk of ‘cohesive’ sport to foster togetherness and encounter between the worlds of professional and recreational sport.

Faced with this prospect, one may react with scepticism and cynicism. Many may ask: is it not naive to speak of human and social values in sport? Does the Church not know that today sport has become a business? Don’t they know in the Vatican that sport generates vast amounts of money, and that there are interest groups, pressure from sponsors, and private and even state investments that are coveted by many? The answer is: Yes! We are well aware of all this. And yet we do not want to remain prisoners of cynicism!

The world of sport has never lacked the dimension of solidarity and closeness to the weakest. Even now there are many sportsmen and sportswomen who are very committed in these areas. We want to keep this momentum alive, and to work in hope together with all of you to give sport back its soul where this has been lost. We want sport to keep its ‘human face’. We also want sport to be practised in a spirit of ‘fellowship and social friendship’, which are the basis of

the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. The Church wants to see the culture of encounter in all spheres, and so we want it to flourish in the complex world of modern sport. I would therefore like to invite you not to remain prisoners of cynicism and to trust in our common commitment to a more fraternal and united humanity.

Thank you for your attention and I hope that this summit will be a good opportunity for reflection for all of us.