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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the celebrations of 150 years of Rome Capital

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the celebrations for 150 years of Rome Capital, which was read this afternoon by His Eminence Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, at the Teatro dell'Opera of Rome:

Message of the Holy Father

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join, as Bishop of Rome, in the opening of the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Rome Capital which, on the initiative of the Mayor of Rome, Hon. Virginia Raggi, today begin in the presence of the President of the Republic. Remembering the event of Rome Capital, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Montini said: "It seemed like a collapse; and for the pontifical territorial dominion it was [...]. But Providence, as we now see well, had arranged things differently, almost dramatically playing in the events".[1] The proclamation of Rome as Capital was a providential event, which at the time caused controversy and problems. But Rome, Italy and the Church itself changed: a new history began.

Over these 150 years, Rome has grown and changed greatly, "from a homogeneous human milieu to a multiracial community where, in addition to the Catholic view of life, there coexist views inspired by other religious creeds and even by non-religious concepts of existence" (Saint John Paul II, *Address during visit to the Capitoline Hill, seat of Rome's municipal government*, January 15, 1998). The Church, in this affair, has shared the joys and sorrows of the Romans. I would like, almost as an example, to recall at least three moments of this rich common history.

My thoughts turn to the nine months of the Nazi occupation of the city, marked by so much pain, between 1943 and 1944. From 16 October 1943, the terrible persecution for the deportation of the Jews developed. It was the Shoah experienced in Rome. At that time, the Church was an asylum for the persecuted: ancient barriers and painful distances fell. From those difficult times, let us first of all draw the lesson of the everlasting fraternity

between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, which I reaffirmed in my visit to the Major Temple in Rome. We are also convinced, with humility, that the Church represents a resource of humanity in the city. And Catholics are called to live the life of Rome with passion and responsibility, especially its most painful aspects.

I would like to recall, secondly, the years of Vatican Council II, from 1962 to 1965, when the city welcomed the Council Fathers, ecumenical observers and many others. Rome shone as a universal, Catholic, ecumenical space. It became a universal city of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of peace. One saw how much the city meant for the Church and for the whole world. Because, as the German scholar Theodor Mommsen recalled at the end of the nineteenth century: “one is not without cosmopolitan intentions in Rome”[2].

The third moment that I would like to remember is typically diocesan, but it touched the city: the so-called conference on the “evils of Rome” in February 1974, at the behest of the then-Cardinal Vicar Ugo Poletti. In well-attended assemblies of the people, the expectations of the poor and the peripheries were heard. There, it was a question of universality, but in the sense of the inclusion of the peripheries. The city must be home to everyone. It is a responsibility today too: today’s suburbs are afflicted by too many miseries, inhabited by great loneliness and poor in terms of social networks.

There is a demand for inclusion written in the lives of the poor and those who, as immigrants and refugees, see Rome as a port of salvation. Often their eyes, incredibly, see the city with more expectation and hope than we Romans who, because of the many daily problems we face, look at it in a pessimistic way, as if it were destined to decline. No, Rome is a great resource of humanity! “Rome is a city of unique beauty” (*Celebration of First Vespers of Mary, Mother of God, 31 December 2013: Insegnamenti I, 2* [2013], 804). Rome can and must renew itself in the twofold sense of openness to the world and the inclusion of all. The Jubilees also stimulate this, and that of 2025 is no longer far away.

We cannot live in Rome “with our heads down”, each in his own circuits and commitments. On this anniversary of Rome Capital, we need a common vision. Rome will live its universal vocation, only if it becomes an increasingly fraternal city. Yes, a fraternal city! John Paul II, who loved Rome so much, often quoted a Polish poet: “If you say Rome, Love answers you”. It is that love that does not make people live for themselves, but for others and with others.

We need to gather around a vision of a fraternal and universal city, which is a dream proposed to the younger generations. Such a vision is written in the chromosomes of Rome. At the end of his pontificate, Saint Paul VI said: “Rome is unity, and not only of the Italian people, but heir to the ideal typical of civilization as such and as the centre, still today, of the Catholic Church, that is, universal” (*Angelus, 9 July 1978: Insegnamenti XVI* [1978], 541). Rome will be a promoter of unity and peace in the world, inasmuch as it will be able to build itself as a fraternal city.

Let us celebrate 150 years of Rome Capital, a long and significant history. Often forgetfulness of history is accompanied by meagre hope for a better tomorrow and resignation in building it. Taking on the memory of the past inspires us to live a common future. Rome will have a future if we share the vision of a fraternal, inclusive city, open to the world. On the international scene, full of conflict, Rome could be a city of encounter: “Rome speaks to the world of brotherhood, harmony and peace” - said Paul VI (*ibid.*). With such feelings and hopes, I express my fervent wishes for the future of the city and its inhabitants.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 3 February 2020

FRANCIS

[1] “Studi Romani”, Year X, September-October 1962, no. 5, 502-505.

[2] Q. Sella, *Discorsi parlamentari raccolti e pubblicati per deliberazione della Camera dei deputati*, vol. I, Rome 1887, 292.