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Message of the Holy Father Francis, signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, for the 42nd edition of the Meeting for Friendship among peoples (Rimini, 20-25 August 2021)

On the occasion of the 42nd edition of the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, to commence tomorrow in Rimini on the theme “The courage to say I”, the Holy Father Francis has sent the following message to Bishop Francesco Lambiasi of Rimini, through Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin:

Message

From the Vatican, 29 July 2021

To His Most Reverend Excellency

Msgr. FRANCESCO LAMBIASI

Bishop of Rimini

Most Reverend Excellency

The Holy Father is delighted that the Meeting for Friendship among Peoples is once again taking place “in person” and sends you, the organisers and all the participants his greetings with the wish for a fruitful outcome.

The title chosen - “The courage to say I” -, taken from the *Diary* of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, is extremely significant at a time when we need to start off again on the right foot, so as not to waste the opportunity provided by the crisis of the pandemic. “Restart” is the watchword. But it does not happen automatically, because freedom is implied in every human initiative. As Benedict XVI reminded us: “Freedom

presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person ... is a new beginning. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good" (*Spe Salvi*, 24). In this sense, the courage to risk is first and foremost an act of freedom.

During the first lockdown, Pope Francis called everyone to exercise this freedom: "Even worse than this crisis is the tragedy of squandering it" (*Homily for Pentecost*, 31 May 2020).

Despite imposing physical distancing, the pandemic has placed the person, the "I" of each person, back at the centre, in many cases provoking a reawakening of fundamental questions about the meaning of existence and the utility of living that had been dormant or, worse still, censored for too long. It has also inspired a sense of personal responsibility. Many have borne witness to this in different situations. Faced with sickness and pain, faced with the emergence of a need, many people unflinchingly said: "Here I am".

Society has a vital need for people who are responsible. Without a person there is no society, but a random aggregation of beings who do not know why they are together. The only glue left would be the selfishness of calculation and self-interest that makes us indifferent to everything and everyone. Moreover, the idolatries of power and money prefer to deal with individuals rather than with persons, that is, with an "I" focused on its own needs and subjective rights rather than an "I" open to others, striving to form the "we" of fraternity and social friendship.

The Holy Father tirelessly warns those with public responsibilities against the temptation to use people and discard them when they are no longer needed, instead of serving them. After what we have experienced in this time, it is perhaps more evident to us all that the person is the point from which everything can start again. Certainly there is a need to find the resources and the means to get society moving again, but what is needed above all is someone who has the courage to say "I" with responsibility and not with selfishness, communicating with his or her own life that the day can begin with reliable hope.

But courage is not always a spontaneous gift and no one can give it to himself (as Manzoni's Don Abbondio used to say), especially in a time like ours, in which fear - which reveals a profound existential insecurity - plays a role so decisive that it blocks a great deal of energy and impetus towards the future, which is increasingly perceived as uncertain, especially by young people.

In this sense, the Servant of God Luigi Giussani warned of a dual risk: "The first danger [...] is doubtfulness. Kierkegaard notes: 'Aristotle says that philosophy begins with wonder, and not, as in our times, with doubt'. Systematic doubt is, so to speak, the symbol of our time. [...] The second objection to the decision of the self is meanness. [...] Doubt and indulgence, these are our two enemies, the enemies of the self" (*In cammino 1992-1998*, Milan 2014, 48-49).

Where, then, can the courage to say "I" come from? It comes from that phenomenon called *encounter*: "Only in the phenomenon of encounter is the possibility given to the self to decide, to make itself capable of welcoming, of recognising and welcoming. The courage to say 'I' is born in the face of truth, and truth is a presence" (*ibid.*, 49). From the day he became flesh and came to dwell among us, God has given man the possibility of emerging from fear and finding the energy of goodness by following his Son, who died and rose again. The words of Saint Thomas Aquinas are enlightening when he states that "the life of every man would seem to be that wherein he delights most, and on which he is most intent" (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 179, a. 1 co.).

The filial relationship with the eternal Father, which is made present in persons reached and changed by Christ, gives consistency to the self, freeing it from fear and opening it to the world with a positive attitude. It generates a will to goodness: "Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops" (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 9).

It is this experience that instils the courage of hope: "Encountering Christ, letting [oneself] be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no

refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness" (Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, 53).

Let us consider the figure of Saint Peter: the Acts of the Apostles report these words of his, after he had been strictly forbidden from continuing to speak in the name of Jesus: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (4:19-20). Where does "this coward who denied the Lord" find his courage? What happened in this man's heart? The gift of the Holy Spirit" (Pope Francis, *Homily at Mass at the Casa Santa Marta*, 18 April 2020).

The profound reason for the courage of the Christian is Christ. It is the Risen Lord who is our security, who makes us experience profound peace even in the midst of life's storms. The Holy Father hopes that during the week of the Meeting the organisers and guests will give living witness, taking on the task indicated in the programmatic document of his pontificate: "Many ... are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 14).

The joy of the Gospel instils the boldness to set out on new paths: "We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh ... particularly attractive for others" (*ibid.*, 167). This is the contribution that the Holy Father expects the Meeting to give to restarting, in the awareness that "the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all" (Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, 34), no one excluded, because the horizon of faith in Christ is the entire world.

In entrusting this message to you, Your Excellency, Pope Francis asks for your remembrance in prayer and gives his heartfelt blessing to you and the leaders, volunteers and participants in the 2021 Meeting.

I, too, express my best wishes for the success of the event and I take advantage of the occasion to express my deepest reverence to

Your Most Reverend Excellency

Pietro Card. Parolin

Secretary of State
