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Message of the Holy Father, signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, on the occasion of the 43rd Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples

The following is the Message sent on behalf of the Holy Father Francis by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to Bishop Francesco Lambiasi of Rimini, on the occasion of the 43rd edition of the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, taking place at the Fiera di Rimini from 20 to 25 August, on the theme: “A Passion for the Person”:

Message

The Vatican, 21 July 2022

To His Reverend Excellency

Bishop FRANCESCO LAMBIASI

of Rimini

Most Reverend Excellency,

The Holy Father sends you heartfelt greetings and entrusts to you, through me, this message for the upcoming Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, entitled “A Passion for the Person”. On the centenary of the birth of the Servant of God Monsignor Luigi Giussani, the organisers wish to make grateful memory of his apostolic zeal, which prompted him to encounter many people and to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to each one. Fr Giussani said in his speech at the 1985 Meeting: “Christianity was not born to found a religion; it was born as a passion for man. [...] love for man, veneration for man, tenderness for man, passion for man, absolute esteem for man”.

Sometimes it seems like history has turned its back on this gaze of Christ on humankind. Pope Francis has pointed this out on many occasions: “This is also the fragility of the time we live in — believing that there is no chance of redemption, a hand to raise you up, an embrace to save you, forgive you, pick you up, flood you with infinite patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet” (The Name of God is Mercy, a conversation with Andrea Tornielli, Vatican City — translated by Oonagh Stransky, Bluebird Pan Macmillan, London, 2016, pp. 14). This is the most distressing aspect of the experience of so many people who have experienced loneliness during the pandemic or who have had to abandon everything to escape the violence of war. Here then, the parable of the Good Samaritan is today, more than ever, a keyword, because it is clear that “people deep in their hearts expect that the Samaritan will come to their aid; that he will bend down to them, anoint their wounds, care for them and carry them to safety. In the final analysis, they know that they need God’s mercy and his tenderness [...], of a saving love, that is freely-given” (cf. Interview with His Holiness Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, in *Per mezzo della Fede* [Through Faith], edited by Daniele Libanori, Cinisello Balsamo 2016, 129).

The Gospel points to the Good Samaritan as a model of unconditional passion for every brother and sister one encounters along the way; and for this reason it is in profound harmony with the theme of the Meeting: “Let us care for the needs of every man and woman, young and old, with the same fraternal spirit of care and closeness that marked the Good Samaritan” (Enc. *Fratelli Tutti*, 79).

This is not just a matter of generosity, which some have more of and others less. Here, Jesus wants to place us before the deep root of the Good Samaritan’s gesture. Pope Francis describes it like this: “to recognize Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40, 45). Faith has untold power to inspire and sustain our respect for others, for believers come to know that God loves every man and woman with infinite love and ‘thereby confers infinite dignity’ upon all humanity. We likewise believe that Christ shed his blood for each of us and that no one is beyond the scope of his universal love” (ibid., 85).

This mystery never ceases to amaze us, as Fr Giussani himself testified in the presence of Saint John Paul II on 30 May 1998: “‘What is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?’ No question in life has ever struck me like this one. There has been only one Man in the world who could answer me, by asking another question: ‘What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself? Or what could a man give in exchange for himself?’ [...] Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart” (Generating Traces in the History of the World, Montreal 2010, ix).

It is this passion of Christ for the destiny of each creature that must animate the believer’s gaze toward everyone: a gratuitous love, without measure and without calculation. But — we ask ourselves — could this all not appear to be a pious intention, compared to what we see happening in today’s world? In the clash of everyone against everyone, where selfishness and partisan interests seem to dictate the agenda in the lives of individuals and nations, how is it possible to look at those who are beside us as a good to be respected, protected and cared for? How is it possible to bridge the distance that separates one from others? The pandemic and the war seem to have widened the gulf, setting back the path to a more united and solidary humanity.

But we know that the path to fraternity is not traced on clouds: it crosses the many spiritual deserts present in our societies. “In the desert — Pope Benedict XVI said — we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, with their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive” (Homily during Holy Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith, 11 October 2012). Pope Francis does not tire of pointing out the path that crosses the desert bringing life: “Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programmes of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above all an attentiveness which considers the other ‘in a certain sense as one with ourselves’. This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199).

Recovering this awareness is crucial. A person cannot make the journey of self-discovery alone; the encounter with the other is essential. In this sense, the Good Samaritan shows us that our existence is intimately connected to that of others and that a relationship with the other is a condition for becoming fully ourselves and

bearing fruit. By giving us life, God has in some way given us himself so that we, in turn, give ourselves to others: "Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfilment except 'in the sincere gift of self to others'" (Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* , 87). Fr Giussani added that charity is the "moved" gift of self. Indeed, it is moving to think that God, the Almighty, bent over our nothingness, took pity on us and loved us one by one with an eternal love.

What is the fruit of those who, imitating Jesus, make a gift of themselves? "A social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all" (ibid., 94). It is an embrace that breaks down walls and goes out to meet the other in the awareness of the value of every single concrete person, in whatever situation he or she may be. A love of the other for what he or she is: a creature of God, made in his image and likeness, therefore endowed with an intangible dignity, which no one can dispose of or, worse, abuse.

It is this social friendship that we, as believers, are invited to nurture with our witness: "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others" (*Evangelii Gaudium* , 24). What great need the men and women of our time have to encounter people who do not give lessons from a balcony, but who take to the streets to share the daily toil of living, sustained by a reliable hope!

Pope Francis insists on calling Christians to this historic task, for the good of all, in the certainty that the source of the dignity of every human being and the possibility of universal fraternity is the Gospel of Jesus embodied in the life of the Christian community: "If the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth. If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman" (Address at the Ecumenical Prayer Meeting, Riga, Latvia, 24 September 2018).

The Holy Father hopes that the organisers and participants of the 2022 Meeting will accept this call with glad and willing hearts, continuing to collaborate with the universal Church on the path of friendship among peoples, spreading passion for the person in the world. And while entrusting this intention to the intercession of Most Holy Mary, he sends a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

In expressing my personal wishes for a Meeting that fully meets expectations, I affirm my distinguished respect

Your Most Reverend Excellency

most devoted

Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Secretary of State
