



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
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Press Conference to present the Holy See Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – The Venice Biennale

This morning, at 11.00, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the Holy See Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – The Venice Biennale, to take place from 20 April to 24 November 2024.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education; Pres. Giovanni Russo, Head of the Department of Prison Administration of the Ministry of Justice of the Italian Republic; Dr. Chiara Parisi, curator of the Holy See Pavilion; Dr. Bruno Racine, curator of the Holy See Pavilion, and Dr. Paolo Maria Vittorio Grandi, Chief Governance Officer of the Banca Intesa Sanpaolo.

The following is the intervention of His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça

I warmly greet all of you here, especially those seated with me at this table: the deputy director of the Holy See Press Office, Dr. Cristiane Murray; the Head of Department of the National Prisons Administration, Dr. Giovanni Russo; the curators Bruno Racine and Chiara Parisi, and the representative of the major sponsor Banca Intesa-San Paolo, Dr. Vittorio Grandi; and naturally all the journalists here in the room and also those streaming in. Thank you in advance for your interest in this activity of the Holy See and for the valuable professional work you do.

It is not a coincidence that the Holy See has chosen to present its Pavilion at the Venice Biennale – in the year in which it celebrates its sixtieth edition – in a seemingly unexpected place, as the Women’s Prison of the Island of Giudecca might be. And it is certainly not a coincidence that the title of the pavilion, “With my eyes”, wishes to focus our attention on the importance of how, responsibly, we conceive, express and construct our social, cultural and spiritual co-existence. We live in an age marked by the dominance of the digital world and the triumph of distance communication technologies, which propose an increasingly remote and indirect human

gaze, running the risk of becoming detached from reality itself. The contemporary world prefers to metaphorize the look: seeing with one's own eyes confers a unique status to vision, as it involves us directly in reality and makes us not spectators, but witnesses. This is what religious and artistic experience have in common: neither of the two ceases to value the total and anti-conformist implication of the subject.

The year in which the Art Biennale celebrates its sixtieth anniversary also marks sixty years since the first screening of Pier Paolo Pasolini's film "The Gospel according to Saint Matthew", shown for the first time in Venice. And Pasolini confessed then that his fascination with Jesus as narrated by the Evangelist Matthew was due to its being "at the limits of metaphoricality, to the point of being reality". It suffices to recall Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me". "When did we see you?", they all ask in the parable of the last judgement that Jesus recounts. And it is there that Jesus offers the key to a new vision, saying that "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me".

This is one of the biblical texts most commented on by Pope Francis, and which we can certainly associate with the major tenets of his pontificate. Pope Francis affirms: "Works of mercy are not theoretical ideas, but concrete testimonies. They oblige us to roll up our sleeves to alleviate suffering. ... It is necessary, therefore, that we remain as vigilant as watchmen, so that, when facing the poverty produced by the culture of wellbeing, the Christian gaze does not weaken and become incapable of focusing on what is essential".

Regaining the capacity to look at reality, as a starting point in order to redesign it, choreographing new possibilities: Pope Francis reminded artists of this when he received them in the historic meeting last June, in the Sistine Chapel. "As artists, you have the ability to dream new versions of the world, to introduce novelty into history. New visions of the world. That is why Guardini also says that you are like visionaries. You are a bit like prophets. You can see things both in depth and from afar, like sentinels who strain their eyes, peering into the horizon".

It is with great joy, then, that we have received the news of Pope Francis' visit to the Pavilion. It will be a historic moment, as he will be the first Pope to visit the Venice Biennale, which clearly demonstrates the Church's will to consolidate a fruitful and intimate dialogue with the world of the arts and culture.

My thanks go to the Italian authorities for their indispensable collaboration, in particular the Ministry of Justice in the person of the Head of the Department for National Prison Administration, Dr. Giovanni Russo, present here. A word is also due to the curators Bruno Racine and Chiara Parisi, who form an extraordinary team and, I am sure, will not disappoint. Nor do I wish to forget those who are collaborating in the realization of the pavilion: the COR architects, and in particular the architect Roberto Cremascoli. I express my gratitude to our main partner, the Banca Intesa-San Paolo. And last, but not least in my heart, the Patriarchate of Venice, and the Patriarch Francesco Moraglia, with whom I enjoy close and friendly cooperation.

Naturally, I remain available to answer your questions, at the end of the presentations. Thank you.
