



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II,
SIGNED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE,
CARDINAL ANGELO SODANO, TO THE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE 23rd MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP
AMONG PEOPLES HELD IN RIMINI**

Holy Father's message, signed by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, to Bishop Mariano De Nicolò of Rimini, Italy, for the 23rd Meeting for Friendship among Peoples of the ecclesial movement Communion and Liberation.

Dear Bishop De Nicolò,

On the occasion of the *23rd Meeting for Friendship Among the Peoples*, the Holy Father invites you to offer the participants his cordial greeting and to express to them his deep appreciation of this important initiative, which in the last few years has become an important event in the Italian Catholic world.

You have chosen a provocative topic for your meeting: "*The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty*". Christ said: "I am the truth" (cf. Jn 14,6), and those who met him on the roads also saw in him "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45[44],3). The unique correspondence of truth and beauty in the Word made man is portrayed in the depictions of Christian art which, in our time, inspire the desire to rediscover it in contemporary works. In fact, today, thought often tends to assert that truth is foreign to the world of art. Beauty is only supposed to affect the feelings and so to offer a delightful escape from the iron laws that rule the world. But is this really the case?

The beauty of nature, things and people, seen as they are, can be stunning. How can we not see in a mountain sunset, in the immensity of the ocean, or in the features of a face, something that both attracts us and invites us to want to know more about the reality in which we live? This observation impelled Greek thought to give rise to the idea that philosophy is born from the wonder that is inseparable from the fascination of beauty. Even what lies outside the tangible world has its own deep beauty that impresses the spirit and gives rise to admiration. Think of the

powerful spiritual attraction of an act of justice, a gesture of forgiveness, a sacrifice made with joy and generosity for a great ideal.

In the beautiful what we find shining forth is the truth which draws to itself with the unmistakable fascination that great values exercise. Thus, sentiment and reason are radically united in an appeal that is made to the whole person. Reality, with its beauty, allows us to experience the beginning of attainment and whispers to us: "You will not be unhappy; your heart's desire will be fulfilled, indeed, it is already being fulfilled".

Beauty can sometimes seduce and corrupt, but this degeneration, as the Gospel recalls, represents the bitter fruit of an evil choice born in the person's heart, since "there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him" (Mk 7,15). Here the person's sight stops at appearances; by denying the invitation present in every beautiful thing to go beyond it, he denies its value as sign and seeks to possess it, thus gradually losing every trace of beauty.

St Augustine refers to this sorrowful experience in the *Confessions* when he admits: "I threw myself on the beautiful things you created. Your creatures, which would not have existed except in you, kept me apart from you" (X, 27,38). The Bishop of Hippo recalls, however, that it was precisely beauty that reunited him with God: "You called me, you shouted, and you overcame my deafness. You sent a bright light, you shone and dispelled my blindness. You spread your fragrance, I inhaled it and now I long for you" (*ibid.*)

The radiance of the beauty we contemplate opens the soul to the mystery of God. The *Book of Wisdom* reproached those who "were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists" (13,1), from the admiration of their beauty they should have been able to ascend to their Author (cf. 1,3; 3). Indeed, "from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (13,5). Beauty has a pedagogical power that can introduce us effectively to the knowledge of the truth. Finally, it leads to Christ who is the Truth. Indeed, when love and the quest for beauty flow from a vision of faith, we can have a deeper perception of things and enter into contact with the One who is the source of every beautiful thing.

Christian art at its best splendidly confirms this insight, and such art appears as a tribute to transfigured beauty that is rendered eternal by the vision of faith.

The Supreme Pontiff fervently hopes that the *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples* will contribute to spreading the new way of looking at things that Jesus teaches us. In this way, art can become a means of evangelization and can help promote a renewal of missionary outreach.

The Holy Father also expresses his fervent hope that this meeting will be for all the participants a precious opportunity of communion in charity, growth in faith and of the contemplation of God, the

true and supernatural Beauty.

To this end, he assures you of his remembrance in prayer, and invoking the motherly intercession of Mary, *Tota pulchra (All Beautiful)*, he imparts a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to the sponsors, the organizers and to all who will be taking part in the *Meeting*.

I add my own good wishes for the success of the event, and take this opportunity to confirm, with deep respect, that I remain

Devotedly yours in the Lord,
Cardinal Angelo Sodano
Secretary of State