



The Holy See

**MESSAGE SENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
ON BEHALF OF THE HOLY FATHER ON THE OCCASION OF THE
38th MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES**

[RIMINI, 20-26 AUGUST 2017]

Your Most Reverend Excellency,

On behalf of the Holy Father Francis and myself, I express a cordial greeting to you, to the organizers and those attending the 38th edition of the *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*.

The themes of the Meetings each year invite reflection on the aspects of existence, which the pressing rhythm of everyday life often causes to be set aside in brackets. Everything seems to overwhelm us, gripped as we are by the anxiety of rushing to turn the page. Life is fragmented and at risk of becoming arid. For this reason it is valuable to stop every once in a while to ponder the great questions which define our human 'being' and which cannot be ignored completely.

In this sense we can also read the theme of the 2017 Meeting: "All that you have, bequeathed you by your father, earn it in order to possess it" (Goethe, *Faust*). It is an invitation to regain control of our origins through our own personal experience. For too long it has been thought that our fathers' legacy would endure as a treasure that need only be preserved in order to keep its flame alight. It has not been so: that fire that burned in the heart of those who have gone before us has slowly abated.

One of the limitations of today's societies is having too little memory, disposing of what has preceded us as a useless and heavy burden. But this has serious consequences. Let us think about education: how can we hope to help the new generations develop without memory? And how should we think of building the future without upholding the history that has generated the present? As Christians we do not cultivate nostalgia for a past that is no more. We instead look forward confidently. We do not have spaces to defend because Christ's love knows no insurmountable limitations. We live in a favourable time for an outward bound Church, but a

Church rich in memory, impelled by the wind of the Spirit to go to meet the man or woman who is searching for a reason to live. There are countless traces of God's presence throughout world history; indeed, everything begins with Creation, which speaks to us of Him. The true and living God wished to share our history: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). God is not a memory, but a presence, to be welcomed ever anew, as the beloved of the person who loves.

There is a disease which can strike the baptized and which the Holy Father calls "spiritual Alzheimer's": it consists in forgetting the history of our personal relationship with God, that first Love that conquered us until making us his own. If we become "forgetful" of our encounter with the Lord, we are no longer certain of anything; then we are attacked by the fear that impedes our every movement. If we abandon the safe port of our bond with the Father, we fall prey to the whims and desires of the moment, slaves of "false infinities", which promise the moon but leave us disappointed and sad, desperately searching for something to fill the void in our heart. How can we avoid this "spiritual Alzheimer's"? There is only one way: focus on the beginning, the "first Love", which is not a discourse nor an abstract thought, but a Person. The beneficial memory of this beginning ensures the necessary impulse to face the ever new challenges that demand equally new responses, always open to the surprises of the Spirit that blows where it wills.

How do we get to the great Tradition of the Faith? How does Jesus' love reach us today? Through the life of the Church, through a multitude of witnesses who for 2,000 years have proclaimed anew the coming of God-with-us and who allow us to relive the experience of the beginning, as it was for the first to meet Him. For us too, "Galilee is *the place where they were first called, where everything began!*", and for this reason it is necessary "to return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey ..., when Jesus passed my way, gazed at me with mercy and asked me to follow him ..., reviving the memory of that moment when his eyes met mine (Pope Francis, *Easter Vigil Homily*, 19 April 2014).

That gaze always precedes us, as Saint Augustine reminds us, speaking of Zacchaeus: "He was seen, and therefore saw" (*Sermon 174*, 4.4). We must never forget this beginning. Here is what we have inherited, the precious treasure that we must rediscover each day, if we want it to be ours. Fr Giussani drew an effective image of this task that we cannot abandon: "Those who love the child instinctively offer him, and fill his knapsack with, the best of their experiences.... There comes a point, however, when nature gives the child the instinct to take this knapsack and look at it.... What one has been told must become a *problem*. Unless this happens, it ... will never mature.... The young student will now explore the contents of his knapsack, critically comparing what's inside it — his received tradition — with the longings in his heart ... a need for the true, the beautiful, and the good.... By doing so, he will gain maturity and become an adult" (*Il rischio educativo*, Milan 2005, 17-19).

"Earning one's inheritance" is a commitment to which Mother Church calls every generation; and

the Holy Father invites us not to let ourselves be frightened by toil and suffering, which are part of the journey. We are not allowed to look at reality from the balcony, nor can we remain comfortably seated on the sofa to watch the world pass by before us on tv. Only by earning anew the true, the beautiful and the good left to us by our forbears can we experience the epochal change in which we are immersed, as an opportunity, as an occasion to communicate the joy of the Gospel to people in a convincing way.

For this reason, Pope Francis invites the organizers and the volunteers of the Meeting to hone their vision in order to discern the many signs — more or less explicit — of the need for God as the ultimate meaning of existence, so as to be able to offer people a living response to the great questions of the human heart. This year too, visitors can see in you trustworthy witnesses to the hope which does not disappoint. You speak to them through meetings, exhibitions, performances, and above all, your very life.

While asking you to pray for his Ministry, His Holiness wholeheartedly conveys to you, Your Excellency, and to all those participating in the Meeting, the Apostolic Blessing as desired. I extend my personal good wishes and, as I await my intervention on the last day of the Meeting, I convey to you my most distinguished respects