



The Holy See

**MESSAGE SENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
ON BEHALF OF THE HOLY FATHER ON THE OCCASION OF THE
39th MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES**

[RIMINI, 19-25 AUGUST 2018]

Your Excellency,

This year too, the Holy Father Francis wishes to convey, through you, a cordial greeting to the organizers, volunteers and participants in the 39th *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*, a greeting to which I join my personal wishes for a successful outcome.

The title of the *Meeting* — “The forces that move history are the same that make man happy” — takes up an expression of Fr Giussani and refers to the crucial turning point that took place in society around 1968, the effects of which have not been exhausted 50 years later, such that Pope Francis affirms that “today we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change” (*Address to the Fifth National Conference of the Italian Church*, Florence, 10 November 2015).

The break from the past became the categorical imperative of a generation that set its hopes on revolutionized structures capable of ensuring greater authenticity of life. Many believers gave in to the allure of this prospect and made of the faith a moralism which, taking Grace for granted, placed its trust in concrete efforts to achieve a better world.

Thus, it is significant that, in that context, Fr Giussani said to a young man immersed in the search for the ‘powers that dominate history’: “The forces that move history are the same that make man happy” (*The Life of Fr Giussani*, BUR 2014, p. 412). With these words he challenged him to ascertain which powers change history, raising the bar by which to measure his revolutionary attempt.

What became of that attempt? What remains of that wish to change everything? This is not the

place for an historical accounting, but we can evaluate some symptoms arising from the current situation in the West. There is a return to building walls, rather than building bridges. We tend to be closed, instead of open to the other who is different from us. Indifference, rather than the desire to take the initiative for change, is growing. There is a prevailing sense of fear rather than trust in the future. And one wonders whether the world has become more inhabitable in this half century.

This question also concerns we Christians who lived through the season of 1968 and who are now called to reflect, along with many other protagonists, and to ask ourselves: what have we learned? What can we appreciate? Man has always been tempted to think that his intelligence and his abilities are the principles that govern the world; a claim that is realized in two ways: “One is the attraction of gnosticism, ... which ultimately keep[s] one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the ... neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers” (Apostolic Exhortation [*Evangelii gaudium*, 94](#)).

But then, must a Christian who wants to avoid these two temptations necessarily give up the desire for change? No, it is not a matter of withdrawing from the world so as not to risk making mistakes and in order to preserve a sort of uncontaminated purity, because “an authentic faith ... always involves a deep desire to change the world” ([*ibid.*, 183](#)), to move history, as the title of the *Meeting* states.

Many will wonder: is it possible? A Christian cannot stop dreaming that the world can change for the better. It is reasonable to dream it, because at the root of this certainty there is the deep conviction that Christ is the beginning of the new world, which Pope Francis summarized with these words: “Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force ...; in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life” ([*ibid.*, 276](#)).

We have seen this “vital power” at work in many situations throughout history. How can we fail to remember that other epochal change that marked the world? [The Holy Father spoke about it to the European episcopate last year](#): “In the twilight of the ancient world, as the glories of Rome fell into the ruins that still amaze us, and new peoples flooded across the borders of the ancient Empire, one young man echoed anew the words of the Psalmist: ‘Who is the man that longs for life and desires to see good days?’. By asking this question in the Prologue of his *Rule*, Saint Benedict ... was not concerned about social status, riches or power. He appealed to the nature common to every human being, who, whatever his or her condition, longs for life and desires to see good days” ([*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community*, 28 October 2017](#)).

Today, who will save this longing which abides, although vaguely, in man’s heart? Only something that measures up to his infinite yearning. If indeed the longing does not find an appropriate object,

it stays blocked and no promise, no initiative can move it. From this point of view, “it is quite conceivable that the modern age, which began with such an exceptional and promising outburst of human activity, may end in the deadliest and most sterile passivity that history has ever known” (H. Arendt, *The human condition*, 2nd ed., Chicago, 1998, 322).

No effort, no revolution can satisfy the heart of man. Only God, who created us with an infinite longing, can fill it with his infinite presence; for this reason he became man: so that men might encounter the One who saves and fulfils the desire to see good days, as recalled in a passage from the *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), the fruit of the Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Holy Father, expressing his appreciation for the exposition dedicated to the great Marian Shrine of Aparecida, offers this passage as his contribution to enhance the theme of the *Meeting*: “The Christ-event is ... the beginning of this new subject emerging in history ...: ‘Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’ (*Deus caritas est*, 1).... The very nature of Christianity therefore consists of recognizing the presence of Jesus Christ and following Him. That was the marvelous experience of those first disciples, who upon encountering Jesus were fascinated and astonished at the exceptional quality of the one speaking to them, especially how he treated them, satisfying the hunger and thirst for life that was in their hearts. The evangelist John has portrayed for us the impact produced by the person of Jesus on the first two disciples who met him, John and Andrew. Everything starts with a question: ‘What are you looking for?’ (Jn 1:38). That question is followed by the invitation to live an experience: ‘Come and you will see’ (Jn 1:39). This account will remain in history as a unique synthesis of the Christian approach” (*Aparecida Document*, 243-244).

The Holy Father hopes that this year’s *Meeting* may be, for all those who will take part in it, an occasion to deepen or to embrace the Lord Jesus’ invitation: “Come and you will see”. This is the force that, while it frees man from the slavery of “false infinities” that promise happiness without the ability to ensure it, makes him a new protagonist on the world scene, called to make history the place of encounter of the children of God with their Father and among brothers and sisters.

While assuring his prayers that you may be equal to this exciting challenge, Pope Francis asks for prayers for himself and for the World Meeting of Families that will take place [in Dublin from 25 to 26 August](#).

In uniting my personal best wishes, accompanied by prayer, I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt respect.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State

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