



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF CATHOLIC ACTION

After the election of the new authorities for the International Forum of Catholic Action, I congratulate those who have accepted the task of leading it for this next period, which continues the journey that began more than 30 years ago. In that moment, Venerable Cardinal Eduardo Pironio sensed the need to create this forum so that the life of Catholic Action would contribute to the challenge of the new evangelization, enriched by the uniqueness of each place and culture. Many steadily accompanied that insight and put forth their own skills and the desire to proclaim the Gospel in that service, despite the difficulties of their own time, as they did not have the means of communication and access between countries that exist today.

Certainly, the global context that accompanies the new phase is not the same as the one from 30 years ago, nor is the context from the previous leadership. The social and personal consequences of the pandemic continue to mark the spirit and outlook of the life and future of many. In some areas, the individualism of a one-size-fits-all salvation has been revived; not to mention the scourge of violence between countries and brothers that is shaking the desire for universal brotherhood. However, difficult times can represent a challenge and become times of hope. As Cardinal Pironio, a man of hope, used to say, “How important it is to be a sign in life! But not an empty sign or a sign of death; rather, a sign of light that communicates hope. Hope can overcome difficulties, disagreements, the crosses of daily life”.

At the same time, as a Church we are going through a time in which we need the synodal spirit to take root in our way of being Church. That means the exercise of walking together in the same direction. I am convinced that this is what God expects from the Church of the third millennium: that she regain the awareness that she is a people on a journey, who must journey together. For this reason, I would like to ask you to inspire the Catholic Action groups in different local churches with this spirit. We need to learn to listen to each other with a synodal spirit, to relearn the art of speaking with the other without walls or prejudices, also and especially with those who are excluded, marginalised, to seek closeness, which is God’s style (cf. *The Pope Video For a Church open to everyone*, October 2022).

From this perspective, I urge the new leadership to be men and women who listen. I hope that they will not be desk, paper and Zoom “executives”, and that they will not fall into the temptation of institutional structuralism that plans and organises from statutes, regulations and inherited proposals, which were good and useful in their time, but that perhaps today are not relevant. Please, I ask you to listen.

Firstly, listen to the real men, women, elderly, young people and children, in their contexts, in the silent cries expressed in their gazes and in their profound lamentations. Have an attentive ear so as not to give answers to questions no one asks, nor say things that do not interest or help anyone. Listen with open ears to newness with a Samaritan heart.

Second, listen to the beats of the signs of the times. The Church must not be on the margins of history, embroiled in her own affairs, staying in her own bubble. The Church is called to listen to and see the signs of the times, to make history — with its complexities and contradictions — a history of salvation. We need a vitally prophetic Church, starting from signs and gestures that show that there is another possibility for coexistence, human relations, work, love, power and service.

And lastly, to make this possible, we need to listen to the voice of the Spirit. In every age, the Spirit opens us to his newness; “He constantly teaches the Church the vital importance of going forth, impelled to proclaim the Gospel. The importance of our being, not a secure sheepfold, but an open pasture” (*Homily on Pentecost Sunday*, 5 June 2022). While the worldly spirit pushes us to focus only on our own problems and interests, on the need to be important, on the tenacious defence of our goods and group, the Spirit frees us from obsessing over urgencies, and invites us to walk ancient and ever-new paths: those of witness, poverty and mission, to free us from ourselves and send us into the world.

Perhaps you feel that the proposal to listen is a small thing. However, listening is not passive. It is active listening that gives our work rhythm; it is the necessary inhalation to be a Church that breathes in a missionary way. That is what the Most Blessed Virgin did, because she listened, she got up and went to serve.

I pray that you will be able to make this period a time of grace, with the boldness to know how to listen, the serenity to discern and the courage to proclaim with life and starting from life. Thank you for having accepted this challenge. I pray to God for each one of you. Please, do not stop praying for me.

May Jesus bless you and the Blessed Virgin keep you.

Fraternally.

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