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## **Cardinal Parolin in Vilnius: the diplomacy of the Holy See at the service of peace**

Vatican City, 9 May 2016 – Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, as papal legate, attended the National Congress of Mercy in Vilnius, Lithuania. Last Saturday, he celebrated Holy Mass at the Hill of Crosses, a place of great symbolic importance, beloved to the population and declared by St. John Paul II during his 1993 pilgrimage as a place of hope, peace, love and sacrifice.

Yesterday, Sunday the cardinal celebrated Mass in the Cathedral of Sts. Stanislaus and Ladislaus, and during his homily he recalled that the message of God's mercy has particular associations with the city, because of the presence of the venerable seventeenth century icon of the Mother of Mercy and because it was here, in 1934, that the first image of the Divine Mercy was painted by the artist Eugeniusz Kazimirowski at the behest of St Faustina Kowalska and her spiritual director Fr Michał Sopoćko.

The Secretary of State affirmed that the National Congress "should not be seen as an isolated one-off event but as an encouragement for all local Church communities to embrace the message of divine mercy and undertake initiatives that will continue into the future and thus become a concrete and lasting result of this special Jubilee Year."

"The gift of God's mercy is also a gift to be shared with others", he observed. "We have received God's forgiveness; we too must forgive. Every day we pray: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' We must become agents of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this regard, I am reminded of what Pope John Paul II said to the Lithuanian clergy when he met them here in the Cathedral in 1993. After acknowledging the sufferings of the Catholic community during the previous decades, he urged the priests, in particular, to be good Samaritans towards their brothers and sisters who continued to bear the burden of a past dominated by suspicion and accusation, the weight of the long years of the silence of God. ... Pope Francis also evokes the example of the Good Samaritan, urging us to practise the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which are the hallmarks of the Christian life. He addresses this call not only to individuals, but also to communities, including the international community. We are all called to overcome the culture of indifference which closes our eyes, ears and hearts to the needs of our neighbour. ... Let us not allow this Extraordinary Jubilee Year go by without taking its central message to heart and putting it into practice. Let us open our hearts to God's mercy and seek his pardon. Let us become promoters of forgiveness and reconciliation in our homes, schools, places of work and communities."

Today Cardinal Parolin gave a conference with students in international relations and political sciences at the University of Vilnius, entitled "The diplomacy of the Holy See at the service of peace", in the Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Apostle.

"The Holy See, along with the international community as a whole, believes that the international and regional multilateral organisations set up in the aftermath of the Second World War have an essential role to play in the promotion of peace", he affirmed. "For this reason, prompted by its interest in the great questions affecting humanity as a whole and wishing to offer its own particular contribution, the Holy See has been involved with these organisations practically from the outset. In these bodies, the Holy See has been active in promoting peace and in seeking to bring about the conditions necessary to ensure genuine lasting peace, such as respect for human rights, including the right to life and the right to freedom of conscience and religion, humanitarian law, environmental protection, disarmament, adequate care for migrants and refugees, integral human development, sufficient food and water resources, adequate healthcare and education."

"Regarding these issues, the Holy See's contribution is obviously not a technical, political or commercial one", he emphasised. "Instead, it approaches them from a moral and spiritual point of view, offering perspectives and insights which would otherwise not always be heard or taken into account, in the hope of overcoming inadequate or partial positions so as to promote the genuine good of all. In his programmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis explains this approach: 'In her dialogue with the State and with society, the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue. Together with the various sectors of society, she supports those programmes which best respond to the dignity of each person and the common good. In doing this, she proposes in a clear way the fundamental values of human life and convictions which can then find expression in political activity.'"

"To conclude, an approach based on mercy, such as the one adopted by Pope Francis and actively promoted by the Holy See, has much to offer to international diplomacy in its pursuit of peace. The avoidance of facile judgements in the complexity of disputes and the cultivation of a certain flexibility in building bridges allow a mentality to form which can lead to positive results. The Pope's own journeys to places where people are suffering and where the wounds are most painful, during which he skilfully employs the eloquence of words and gestures, are themselves a powerful message of mercy and an important contribution to peace. In the end, mercy can reach the heart of everyone, not just believers, and today politics and diplomacy need to be infused with the conviction that mercy is capable of overcoming all situations of human misery", affirmed the cardinal at the end of his address.

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