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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Romania (31 May to 2 June 2019) – Meeting with the Roma Community in Blaj

Meeting with the Roma Community in Blaj

In the afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the Palace of the Curia and transferred by popemobile to the *Barbu Lăutaru* quarter of Blaj where, at 15.30 (14.30 in Rome) he met with the Roma community of the city in the new church dedicated to Saint Andrew the Apostle and to the Blessed Ioan Suci.

Upon arrival the Pope was received by the bishop of the major archiepiscopal Curia, a family and some children who offered him a floral tribute which he placed before the icon of Our Lady. Before entering the church, where around sixty people awaited him, the bishop gave Pope Francis a cross and the holy water for aspersion. Then, after a testimony from a Greek Catholic priest of Roma ethnicity and a hymn performed by children, the Holy Father gave a greeting. At the end of the meeting, after the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the final blessing, the Holy Father left Blaj for Sibiu and for his farewell to Romania.

The following are the Holy Father's words of greeting to the Roma Community:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good afternoon!

I am happy to meet you, and I thank you for your welcome. You, Father Ioan, are quite right when you point to a truth as certain as it is often forgotten: in Christ's Church, there is room for everyone. If it was not like this, it would not be Christ's Church. The Church is *a place of encounter*. We need to keep this in mind, not as a pretty slogan but rather as part of our identity card as Christians. You reminded us of this by recalling the example of the bishop and martyr Ioan Suci, who gave concrete expression to the desire of God our Father to encounter every person in friendship and in sharing. The Gospel of joy is communicated in the happiness of encounter and the knowledge that we have a Father who loves us. Knowing that he watches out for us, we learn how to watch

out for one another. In this spirit, I have wanted to shake hands with you, to look you in the eye and to open my heart to you, in prayer and in the hope of becoming part of your own prayers and entering into your hearts.

My heart, however, is heavy. It is weighed down by the many experiences of discrimination, segregation and mistreatment experienced by your communities. History tells us that Christians too, including Catholics, are not strangers to such evil. I would like to ask your forgiveness for this. I ask forgiveness – in the name of the Church and of the Lord – and I ask forgiveness of you. For all those times in history when we have discriminated, mistreated or looked askance at you, with the look of Cain rather than that of Abel, and were unable to acknowledge you, to value you and to defend you in your uniqueness. Cain was not concerned about his brother. Indifference breeds prejudices and fosters anger and resentment. How many times do we judge rashly, with words that sting, with attitudes that sow hatred and division! Whenever anyone is left behind, the human family cannot move forward. Deep down, we are not Christians, and not even good human beings, unless we are able to *see the person* before his or her actions, before our own judgments and prejudices.

The history of humanity is never without Abel and Cain. There is the hand held out and the hand raised to strike. There is the open door of encounter and the closed door of conflict. There is acceptance and there is rejection. There are those who see in others a brother or a sister, and those who see instead an obstacle standing in their way. There is the civilization of love and the civilization of hate. Each day we have to choose between Abel and Cain. Like a person standing at a crossroads, we are faced with a decisive choice: to go the way of reconciliation or the way of vengeance. Let us choose the way of Jesus. It is a way that demands effort, but the way that brings peace. And it passes through forgiveness. May we not let ourselves be dragged along by the hurts we nurse within us; let there be no room for anger. For one evil never corrects another evil, no vendetta ever satisfies an injustice, no resentment is ever good for the heart and no rejection will ever bring us closer to others.

Dear brothers and sisters, as a people, you have a great role to play. Do not be afraid to share and offer the distinctive gifts you possess and that have marked your history. We need those gifts: respect for the value of life and of the extended family, solidarity, hospitality, helpfulness, support and concern for the vulnerable within your community, respect and appreciation for the elderly – this is a great value that you have – and for the religious meaning of life, spontaneity and joie de vivre. Wherever you find yourselves, share those gifts and try to accept all the good that others can offer to you. For this reason, I would encourage you to *journey together*, wherever you are, in helping to build a more humane world, overcoming fear and suspicion, breaking down the barriers that separate us from others, and encouraging mutual trust in the patient and never fruitless search for fraternity. Keep trying to journey together with dignity: the dignity of the family, the dignity of earning your daily bread – yes, this is what helps you to go forward – and the dignity of prayer. Keep looking to the future (cf. *Prayer Meeting with Roma and Sinti People*, 9 May 2019).

Our meeting is the last of my visit to Romania. I came to this beautiful and welcoming country, I came as a pilgrim and a brother, in order to meet all its people. I have met you, I have met so many people, in order to build a bridge between my heart and yours. Now I am returning home, I am returning enriched by the experience of different places and special moments, but above all carrying with me your faces. Your faces will colour my memories and populate my prayers. I thank you and I bring you with me. And now, before I bless you, I ask you a great favour: please pray for me. Thank you!

[*Our Father in Romanian*]

And now I will give you my blessing. And I would like my blessing to go to your whole family, all your friends, all the people you know.

[*Blessing*]

See you soon!

