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Message of the Holy Father, signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, on the occasion of the 44th Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples (Rimini, 20 to 25 August 2023)

The following is a working translation of the Message sent by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, on behalf of the Holy Father Francis, to Bishop Nicolò Anselmi of Rimini, on the occasion of the 44th Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, scheduled to take place in Rimini from 20 to 25 August 2023:

Message

From the Vatican, 29 July 2023

His Reverend Excellency
Bishop Nicolò Anselmi of Rimini

Reverend Excellency,

Once again this year the Holy Father is entrusting to you His Message to the organizers and participants in the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, while, unfortunately, the war and divisions sow rancour and fear in hearts, and the other who is different is often perceived as a rival. Global and pervasive communication causes this widespread attitude to become a mentality, differences to appear as symptoms of hostility, and a kind of epidemic of enmity to occur.

In this context, the title of the *Meeting* seems bold: "*Human existence is an inexhaustible friendship*". Bold because it clearly goes against the trend, in a time characterized by individualism and indifference, which generate loneliness and many forms of rejection.

It is a situation from which it is impossible to escape by one's own strength alone. Humanity has always had experience of this: no-one is saved by themselves. Therefore, in a precise moment in history, God took the

initiative: “He sends us his Son, he gives him to us, he hands him over, he shares him, so that we can learn the way of fraternity, of self-giving. In a definitive way, he opens up a new horizon; he is a new word which sheds light on so many situations of exclusion, disintegration, loneliness and isolation. He is a word which breaks the silence of loneliness” (*Homily in Asunción, Paraguay, 12 July 2015*).

Jesus presents himself as a friend: “No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends” (*Jn 15:15*). The Spirit of the Risen Christ overcame loneliness by giving man his friendship, as pure grace. Don Giussani recalls this with words that suggested the title of this year’s *Meeting*: “In the event of this gift, human solitude is dissolved. The human experience is no longer that of a desolating impotence, but that of an awareness and an energetic capacity [...]. Man’s strength is an Other, man’s certainty is an Other: existence is a profound dialogue, loneliness is abolished at the very roots of every moment of life. [...] Human existence is an inexhaustible friendship” (*The Journey to Truth is an Experience, Milan 2006, 108-109*).

Addressing the young, the Holy Father exalted the value of true friendship, which expands the heart: “Faithful friends ... are also a reflection of the Lord’s love, his gentle and consoling presence in our lives. The experience of friendship teaches us to be open, understanding and caring towards others, to come out of our own comfortable isolation and to share our lives with others” (*Christus vivit, 151*). And we can couple this with another reflection from Don Giussani: “The true nature of friendship is to live freely together for destiny. There cannot be friendship among us, we cannot call ourselves friends, if we do not love the destiny of the other above any other thing, leaving aside any advantage” (*Attraverso la compagnia dei credenti, Milano 2021, 184*).

The attitude of openness to the other as a brother is one of the distinctive features of Pope Francis’ pontificate, of his witness and his teaching: “Our love for others ... moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no-one and a fraternity that is open to all” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti, 94*). It is precisely social friendship, which the Pope continues to recommend as the only chance even in the most dramatic situations – even in the face of war: “Genuine social friendship within a society makes true universal openness possible” (*ibid., 99*).

The law of friendship was laid down by Jesus with these words: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (*Jn 15:13*). Therefore, the Holy Father asks Christians and all men and women of good will not to remain deaf to the cry that rises to God from this world of ours. Speeches are not enough; rather, what is needed are “concrete gestures” and “shared choices” that build a culture of peace where each one of us lives: “reconciling with family members, friends and neighbours, praying for those who hurt us, recognizing and helping those in need, speaking words of peace at school, university or in society, anointing with closeness those who feel alone” (*Address to the World Meeting on Human Fraternity “Not Alone”, 10 June 2023*). It is a road that everyone can travel, and the Church never tires of encouraging us to embark on it, practicing almost obstinately this supreme human and Christian virtue.

Dear friends, is this not perhaps the contribution that the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples* has sought to make in its now more than forty-year history? To be a place of friendship between persons and peoples, opening paths of encounter and dialogue. In this troubled hour of history, the Pope encourages you so that the readiness for an “inexhaustible friendship” – because it is founded in Christ and on the rock of Peter – never fails, ready to grasp the good that anyone can bring to the life of all, because “other cultures are not ‘enemies’ from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life.

other cultures are not enemies to be defended against, but are different reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti, 147*).

It is our human experience, which we share with every person, which we share with every person, whatever cultural and religious tradition they belong to, that is the ground on which the experience of friendship that builds history can be rooted, as Pope Benedict XVI said: “The meeting of cultures is possible because man, despite all the differences of his history and social constructs, remains one and the same being. This one being, man, however, is himself touched in the depth of his existence by truth” (*Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures, 3 March 1993*).

How many friendships have been born in the pavilions of the Rimini Fair during the Meetings! As the Holy Father affirms, “true friendships [...] happen, and then it is as if they were cultivated. To the point of making the other person enter my life” (Interview with *FM Milenium* 106.7, September 2015). Here is a beautiful definition of friendship, to be practiced more and more: letting the other person enter your life.

Pope Francis hopes that the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples* may continue to promote the culture of encounter, open to all, no-one excluded, because in each person there is a reflection of the Father who “gives to all men life and breath and everything” (*Acts* 17:25). May every participant learn a little how to approach others in the manner of Jesus, who “always extends his hand, always tries to raise, so as to ensure that people may heal, be happy and encounter God” (Catechesis, 7 August 2019). In this way, social friendship and friendship between peoples may grow.

To you, Your Excellency, the organizers, the volunteers and all those who will take part in the Meeting, His Holiness asks for remembrance in prayer, and sends his heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

Adding my personal good wishes for the best success of the initiative, I would like to take the opportunity to confirm my most faithful respect

to Your Most Reverend Excellency

Pietro Cardinal Parolin
Secretary of State
