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Message to the 38th Meeting for friendship between peoples (Rimini, 20-26 August 2017)

On the occasion of the 38th *Meeting for friendship between peoples*, which began today in Rimini on the theme “All that you have, bequeathed you by your father, earn it in order to possess it”, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin has sent the following Message on behalf of the Holy Father Francis to Bishop Francesco Lambiasi:

Message

His Most Reverend Excellency
Msgr. Francesco LAMBIASI
Bishop of Rimini

On behalf of the Holy Father Francis, and for my part, I address a cordial greeting to you, the organisers, and the participants in the 38th edition of the *Meeting for friendship between peoples*.

The titles of the *Meeting* invite us each year to reflect on aspects of existence that the frenetic pace of everyday life often makes us set aside, in parenthesis. Everything seems to slip through our fingers, wrapped up as we are in the anxiety of turning the page in a hurry. Life fragments and risks becoming barren. Therefore, it is valuable every now and then to consider the great questions that define our being as humans and which it is impossible to fully ignore.

In this sense we can also interpret the theme of the *Meeting* 2017: “All that you have, bequeathed to you by your father, earn it in order to possess it” (Goethe, *Faust*). It is an invitation to reclaim our origins from within a personal history. For too long it was thought that the legacy of our fathers would have stayed with us like a treasure it would be enough to conserve to keep the flame alive. It was not so: that fire that burned in the breast of those who preceded us gradually weakened.

One of the limits of today’s society is that of having a limited memory, of getting rid of what preceded us as if it

were a useless and heavy burden. But this has serious consequences. Let us think of education: how can we hope to raise the new generations without memory? And how can we think of building the future without taking a position in relation to the history that generated our present? As Christians we do not cultivate any nostalgic repetition of a past that is no longer. Let us instead look ahead confidently. We do not have spaces to defend because Christ's love does not know boundaries that cannot be crossed. We live in a time that is favourable for an outbound Church, but a Church rich in memory, driven by the wind of the Spirit to go towards the man who seeks a reason to live. There are countless traces of the presence of God throughout the history of the world; indeed everything, starting from creation, speaks to us of Him. The true and living God wanted to share our history: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1: 14). God is not a memory, but a presence, to be welcomed anew every time, like the beloved for a person who loves.

There is a sickness that can affect the baptized, which the Holy Father calls "spiritual Alzheimer's": it consists of forgetting the history of our personal relationship with God, that first Love that conquered us so that we became His. If we become "forgetful" of our encounter with the Lord, we are no longer sure of anything; then we are assailed by fear that blocks our every movement. If we abandon the safe port of our bond with the Father, we become prey to the caprices and desires of the moment, slaves to the "false infinities" that promise the moon, but leave us disappointed and sad, in the spasmodic search for something to fill the void of the heart. How can we avoid this "spiritual Alzheimer's"? There is just one way: to focus on the beginnings, the "first Love" that is not a theory or an abstract thought, but a Person. The grateful memory of this beginning guarantees the necessary zeal to face the ever new challenges that demand equally new answers, while always remaining open to the surprises of the Spirit that breathes where He wishes.

How does the great tradition of faith reach us? How does Jesus' love reach us today? Through the life of the Church, through a multitude of witnesses who for two thousand years have been renewing the announcement of the coming of God with us, and enable us to relive the experience of the beginning, as it was for the first who encountered Him. For us too, "Galilee is the place [we] were first called, where everything began", and therefore we need to "return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey. ... when Jesus passed my way, gazed at me with mercy and asked me to follow Him ... reviving the memory of that moment when His eyes met mine" (Francis, *Easter Vigil Homily*, 19 April 2014).

That look always precedes us, as St. Augustine recalls, with reference to Zacchaeus: "He was seen, and therefore saw" (*Sermon 174*, 4.4). We must never forget this beginning. Here is what we have inherited, the precious treasure that we must discover every day, if we want it to be ours. Don Giussani left an effective image of this commitment that we cannot forget: "Those who love the child instinctively offer him, and fill his knapsack with, the best of their experiences, the best choices they made in their own lives. There comes a point, however, when nature gives the child the instinct to take this knapsack and look at it. ... What one has been told must become a problem! Unless this happens, it ... will never mature. ... The young student will now explore the contents of his knapsack, critically comparing what's inside of it – his received tradition – with the longings of his heart ... a need for the true, the beautiful, and the good. ... By doing so he will gain maturity and become an adult" (*The Risk of Education*, Milan 2005, 17-19).

"Regaining one's own heritage" is a commitment to which the Mother Church calls every generation; and the Holy Father invites us not to be afraid of the hardships and suffering that form part of the path. We are not permitted to watch reality from the balcony, nor can we remain comfortably seated on the sofa to watch the world that passes in front of us on the TV. Only by regaining the true, the beautiful and the good that our parents have handed to us can be life as an opportunity the epoch change in which we are immersed, as a chance to communicate to man in a convincing way the joy of the Gospel.

Therefore, Pope Francis invites the organizers and the volunteers of the *Meeting* to keep their eyes open to the many signs, more or less explicit, of the need for God as the ultimate meaning in life, so as to be able to offer to people a living response to the great questions of the human heart. This year too, may visitors see in you reliable witnesses of the hope that does not disappoint. Speak to them with your encounters, your exhibitions, the shows, and above all with your own life.

Reminding you to pray for his ministry, His Holiness heartily sends to you, Excellency, and all the participants in the *Meeting*, the hoped-for apostolic blessing.

I add my personal best wishes and, as I await to intervene during the concluding day of the *Meeting*, I convey my most distinguished respects to Your Most Reverend Excellency.

Pietro Cardinal Parolin
Secretary of State
