



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
SIGNED BY THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES
[RIMINI, 24 - 30 AUGUST 2014]**

Your Excellency,

On the occasion of the 35th *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*, I am pleased to convey to You, to the organizers and volunteers, and to all those attending the cordial greeting and the blessing of His Holiness Pope Francis, together with my personal good wishes for the success of this important initiative.

The theme chosen for this year — *To the Ends of the Earth and of Existence* — echoes a constant solicitude of the Holy Father. Since his episcopate in Buenos Aires, he has realized that the “ends of the earth” are not only places, but also and above all people, as he said in his intervention during the pre-Conclave General Congregation meetings of the Cardinals: “The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all forms of misery” (9 March 2013).

Thus Pope Francis thanks the leaders of the Meeting for having accepted and taken up his invitation to journey in this perspective. According to the Gospel, an “outgoing” Church is the only way; this is shown by the life of Jesus, who went from village to village proclaiming the Kingdom of God and sent his disciples before him. This is why the Father sent him into the world.

The second part of the Meeting’s theme — *Destiny Has Not Left Man Alone* — is an expression of the servant of God, Don Luigi Giussani, which reminds us that the Lord has not left us to ourselves, he has not forgotten us. In ancient times he chose one man, Abraham, and he set him on a journey toward the Promised Land. And in the fullness of time he chose a young woman, the Virgin Mary, in order to take on flesh and come to live among us. Nazareth was truly an

insignificant village, a “periphery” with respect to both politics and religion; but that was exactly where God looked to fulfil his plan of mercy and faithfulness.

A Christian is not afraid to decentralize, to go toward the ends of the earth, because his centre is in Jesus Christ. He frees us from fear; in his company we are able to move forward safely in any place, even through the dark times of life, knowing that, wherever we go, the Lord always goes before us with his grace, and it is our joy to share with others the good news that He is with us. Jesus’ disciples, after completing a mission, returned with joy because of their success. But Jesus told them: “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20-21). It is not we who save the world, it is only God who saves it. Today’s men and women run the great risk of a sad, individualistic, isolated life, even in the midst of an abundance of consumer goods, from which many others, however, remain excluded. Often prevailing lifestyles lead to placing one’s hope in financial security or in power or in purely earthly success. Christians also run this risk. The Holy Father has affirmed that “In some places a spiritual ‘desertification’ has evidently come about, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 86). But this must not discourage us, as Benedict XVI reminded us when he inaugurated the Year of Faith: “In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, with their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive” (*Homily at the Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith*, 11 October 2012).

Pope Francis calls for collaboration, also from the *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*, for this return to the essential, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’” (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 15), that is, “by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation” (*ibid.*, n. 128).

The Holy Father calls the attention of the leaders and participants of the Meeting to two particular points.

First and foremost, he asks them never to lose touch with reality, rather, to love reality. This too is part of the Christian witness: in the presence of a dominant culture which gives top priority to appearances, all that is superficial and temporary, the challenge is to choose and love reality. Don Giussani left this legacy as a plan of life, when he said: “The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious is always to live reality intensely. The formula for the journey to the meaning of reality, without preclusion, means without negating or forgetting anything. Indeed, it would not be human, that is to say, reasonable, to take our experience at face value, to limit it merely to the

crest of the wave, without discerning the core of its motion” (*The Religious Sense*, p. 150).

Additionally, his invitation is to always keep one’s gaze focused on the essential. The most serious problems, in fact, arise when the Christian message is identified by secondary aspects, which do not convey the heart of the message. In a world where, after 2,000 years, Jesus is once again unknown in so many countries, also in the West, “We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 34). For this, a world in such rapid transformation calls Christians to be available to look for forms or ways to communicate with a language which comprehends the perennial newness of Christianity. In this too it is important to be realistic. “Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way” (*ibid.*, n. 46).

His Holiness shares these reflections as his contribution to the week of the Meeting, to all those who will attend it, particularly to the leaders, the organizers and relators who will come from the peripheries of the world and of existence to witness that God the Father does not leave his children alone. The Pope hopes that many will be able to relive the experience of the first disciples of Jesus, those who, encountering him on the banks of the Jordan, heard him ask: “What are you looking for?”. May this, Jesus’ question always accompany the journey of those attending the *Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*.

While asking us to pray for him and for his ministry, Pope Francis invokes the maternal protection of the Virgin Mother and from his heart imparts the Apostolic Blessing to Your Excellency and the entire community of the Meeting.

Pietro Card. Parolin