



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE XXV INTERNATIONAL MEETING
OF COLUMBAN ASSOCIATIONS, "COLUMBAN'S DAY 2024"**

[Piacenza, 22-23 June 2024]

Dear brothers and sisters!

I offer a cordial greeting to all of you assembled in Piacenza for Columban's Day 2024, the twenty-fifth International Meeting of Columban Associations. In a particular way, I greet Bishop Adriano Cevolotto of Piacenza-Bobbio, as well as the other bishops and civil authorities present.

This occasion is indeed a cause for rejoicing, since for the past twenty-five years you have been meeting in the name of the great Irish abbot and have succeeded in creating a network of spiritual and cultural friendships in that part of Europe where Saint Columban and his companions left the imprint of their beneficent presence. Yours is certainly no merely historical, much less folkloric, commemoration. Rather, it aims to advance knowledge of Saint Columban and his legacy as a source of enrichment for both the Church and civil society in our own time.

At first glance, this aim might appear unrealistic, given the vast difference between the Europe of today and that of the sixth and seventh centuries, and between our way of life and the model proposed by the holy abbot and his companions. Yet, it is precisely this contrast, this difference, which makes the witness of Saint Columban's message especially provocative and indeed attractive to us, immersed as we are in practical materialism and a type of neo-paganism. The Irish monks of those days became pilgrims and missionaries precisely in order to re-evangelize large areas of a continent where the first fruits of Christianity were at risk of being lost. Together with the work of reclaiming and cultivating those territories, they also made outstanding contributions to the fields of spirituality, learning and ethics. In this way, like the Benedictines elsewhere, the life and labours of the Columban monks proved decisive for the preservation and renewal of European culture.

In our own time, then, we need to draw nourishment from the vital “lymph” of the Gospel, lest the continent’s ecclesial and civil communities lose their identity and sink into a bland globalization, constantly at the mercy of the prevailing powers, but instead discover ways to express their faith and culture with creative fidelity to their rich traditions. In this way, they will be able to contribute to building up a Europe made up of peoples who live harmoniously, side by side, preserving their distinctiveness, yet open to encounter and dialogue with other cultures in our world.

I thank you, then, dear brothers and sisters, for participating in this initiative, especially those of you whose activities are inspired by the Gospel and carried out in respectful cooperation with the civil authorities. Upon all of you, and your various associations, I invoke the protection of Saint Columban. I bless you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

From the Vatican, 11 June 2024

FRANCIS