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Papal diplomacy cannot ignore the urgent need to make mercy palpable in the world

This morning in the Clementine Hall Pope Francis received the participants in the meeting of papal representatives, held in the Vatican from 15 to 17 September for the Jubilee of Mercy.

In his address to the papal diplomats, published in part below, the Holy Father reiterated the importance of nuncios as representatives of an “outbound” Church, wherever they may be, and of integrating into their destination, opening up their bags to share the riches they bring but also to receive what they do not have. He also emphasised the urgency of making the voice of mercy resonate in international forums, and urged the nuncios, who propose candidates to the episcopal college, to cast their nets wide in their search for new bishops.

The following are extensive extracts from the Holy Father’s address to the papal representatives:

Welcome to Rome! To embrace her again at this Jubilee hour has a special meaning for you. Here many of your wellsprings and your memories reside. Here you arrived, still young, with the purpose of serving Peter, you return here often to encounter him, and from here you continue to depart as his envoys, taking his message, his closeness, and his witness. ... I thank you for the dedication and for your ready and generous willingness, in a life full of commitments and characterised by an often difficult pace. You touch with your hands the flesh of the Church, the splendour of the love that makes her glorious, but also the wounds that make her beg for forgiveness. With a genuine ecclesial sense and your humble effort to know the various problems and issues, you make the Church and the world present in the heart of the Pope. ... As you are not diocesan Pastors, and your name is not pronounced in any particular Church, know that the Pope in every anaphora remembers you as an extension of his own person, as his envoys who serve with sacrifice and skill, accompanying the Bride of Christ and the Peoples in which she resides.

1. Serving with sacrifice as humble envoys

Without humility, no service is possible or fruitful. The humility of a nuncio passes through love for the country

and for the Church in which he is called to serve. ... Being there fully, with the mind and heart undivided; unpacking their own suitcases to share the riches they bring with them, but also to receive what they do not possess. ... Observing, analysing and referring are verbs that are essential, but not sufficient, in the life of a nuncio. It is necessary also to encounter, to listen, enter into dialogue, share, propose and work together, so that a sincere love, sympathy and empathy may develop with the population and the local Church. What Catholics, and also civil society in the broader sense, wish to and must perceive is that, in their country, the nuncio is at ease, as if he were at home; and that he feels free and glad to establish constructive relations, sharing in the daily life of the place (cuisine, language and customs) and expressing his own opinions and impressions with great respect and a sense of closeness.

It is not enough to point the finger or attack those who do not think like us. That is a wretched tactic in today's political and cultural wars, but it cannot be the method of the Church. Our gaze must be extensive and deep. The formation of consciences is our first duty of love, and this requires delicacy and perseverance in its implementation.

Certainly, the threat of the wolf, who from the outside seizes and attacks the flock, is still present. ... The wolf has the same appearance: incomprehension, hostility, wickedness, persecution, displacement of the truth, resistance to goodness, refusal of love, inexplicable cultural hostility, distrust... You are well aware of what wolves of all types are made. I think of the Christians in the East, whose eradication, with the complicit silence of many, seems to be the aim of the violent siege.

One cannot ask the ingenuity of the lamb, but the magnanimity of the dove and the shrewdness and prudence of the wise and faithful servant. It is good to keep eyes open to recognise where hostilities come from so as to discern possible ways to combat their causes and deal with the pitfalls. However, I urge you not to remain in a state of siege, and not to give in to the temptation to cry, to make victims of those who criticise us, provoke us or denigrate us. Reserve your best energies for making the joy and strength of the beatitude proclaimed by Jesus resound again in the soul of the Churches you serve.

The apostolic nunciature is truly the 'Pope's House', not only for ... the diplomatic function, but also for the particular and unique nature of papal diplomacy. Keep watch to ensure that your nunciatures never become refuges for 'friends and friends of friends'. Keep your distance from gossips and careerists.

May your relationship with the civil community be inspired by the evangelical image of the Good Shepherd, able to know and to represent the demands, needs and condition of the flock, especially when the only criteria that define them are disdain, vulnerability and rejection. Do not be afraid of reaching out to difficult and complex frontiers.

In the immense task of ensuring the freedom of the Church before every form of power that wishes to silence Truth, do not delude yourselves that this freedom is solely the fruit of agreements, accords and diplomatic negotiations, however perfect and successful they may seem. ... Remember that you represent Peter, the rock that withstands the flood of ideologies, the reduction of the Word to mere convenience, submission to the powers of this passing world. Therefore, do not position yourselves on political or ideological battle lines, because the permanence of the Church does not rest on the consensus of the drawing room or the town square, but on faithfulness to the Lord Who, unlike wolves and birds, has no den or nest to rest His head.

The Church Bride cannot rest her head other than on the pierced breast of her Spouse. From there springs the true power, that of Mercy. We do not have the right to deprive the world, not even in the forum of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic action and in the great fields of international debate, of this wealth that no other can give. This awareness drives us towards dialogue with all, and in many cases to become a prophetic voice for those who are marginalised for their faith or their ethnic, economic, social or cultural condition.

2. Accompanying the Churches with a Pastor's heart

To accompany, it is necessary to move. ... Do not wait for the people to come to you. ... Be a true expression of

an outbound Church, a 'field hospital', able to live the dimension of the local Church, the country and the institution to which you have been sent. ... This closeness is, nowadays, an essential condition for the fruitfulness of the Church.

The selection of future bishops is a great concern of mine. Speaking with the Congregation for Bishops some time ago, I outlined the profile of the Pastors that I consider necessary for today's Church: witnesses of the Risen Christ and not bearers of a curriculum vitae; praying bishops, familiarised with things 'from above' and not crushed by the weight of what is 'below'; bishops able to enter with patience in God's presence, so as to possess the freedom not to betray the Kerygma entrusted to them; bishops who are pastors, not princes or officials. ... You are the first to have to scrutinise the fields to see where the little Davids are hidden. They are there, God will not let them be lacking. ... You must go out and search for them. ... You must cast your nets out widely. You cannot be content to fish in aquaria, in the reserve or in the breeding ground of 'friends of friends'. At stake is trust in the Lord of history and of the Church, Who never neglects their true good.

3. Accompanying peoples where Christ's Church is present

Your diplomatic service is the watchful and lucid eye of Peter's Successor on the Church and on the world. I beg you to be up to this noble mission, for which you must continually prepare. It is not simply a question of acquiring content on matters which are in any case mutable, but rather a working discipline and a style of life that also enables you to appreciate situations of routine, of grasping changes as they occur, of evaluating new issues, of knowing how to interpret them in a measured way and of suggesting concrete action. It is the pace of our times that demands permanent formation, avoiding taking everything for granted. ... Serious and continuous updating would help overcome that fragmentation by which individually one seeks to perform one's job, but without any, or very little coordination and integration with others. We must increasingly accept the need to work in a unitary and coordinated network, necessary to avoid a personal vision that frequently does not hold up when faced with the reality of the local Church, the country or the international community.

Great are the challenges that await us in our times, and I do not wish to draw up a list of them. ... As is gradually emerging, papal diplomacy cannot be extraneous to the urgency of making mercy palpable in this wounded and shattered world. ... Even in the international context, this means never considering anything or anyone as lost. ... No situation is impermeable to the subtle and irresistible power of God's goodness that never abandons man or his destiny. ... This new radical perception of the diplomatic mission frees the papal representative from immediate geopolitical, economic or military interests, calling upon him to discern in his first governmental, political and social interlocutors and in public institutions the desire to serve the common good. ... The Church, without neglecting the present day, is called to work with a long term outlook, without the obsession of immediate results. She must patiently bear difficult or adverse situations or the changes of plan that reality imposes. ... The Church has no need to occupy spaces of power or self-affirmation, but rather to make the good seed grow, patiently accompanying its development, rejoicing with the provisional harvest that can be obtained, without being discouraged when an unexpected and freezing storm spoils what seemed to be golden and ready to be gathered. Let us trustfully start new processes.

Do not be afraid of speaking trustfully with people and public institutions. We face a world in which it is not always easy to identify the centres of power and many are discouraged, thinking that they are anonymous and unreachable. Instead, I am convinced that people are still accessible. There remains in man the interior space where the voice of God can resound. Engage in dialogue with clarity and do not be afraid that mercy may confound or diminish the beauty and the strength of the truth. The truth is fulfilled in its entirety in mercy.

Dear brothers, in sending you again on your mission ... my concluding word is to entrust you to the joy of the Gospel. We are not bearers of the fear and the night, but custodians of the dawn and the light of the Risen Christ. The world has great fear, and spreads it. Often it makes this the key for interpreting history, and not infrequently adopts it as a strategy to build a world based on walls and trenches. We too can understand the reasons for fear, but we cannot embrace it, 'for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control'. Let us draw from this spirit, and go: open doors, build bridges; weave bonds; establish friendships; promote unity. Be men of prayer: never neglect it, especially in silent adoration, the true source of all your work.

Fear inhabits the dark of the past, but it has a weakness: it is temporary. The future belongs to the light! The future belongs to Christ!"
