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Video Message of the Holy Father for the 7th Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Verona, 23-26 November 2017)

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the opening of the seventh edition of the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church in Verona, Italy, this year entitled “Fidelity is Change”.

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all, participants in the seventh Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which this year is entitled “Fidelity is Change”. This expression, which intentionally causes a certain logical “surprise”, leads us to consider that, in reality, being faithful involves the capacity for change.

Let us think of the experience of Abraham, whom the Bible shows to us as a model of faith. When he was already elderly, God said to him, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (*Gen 12: 1-2*). To be faithful, Abraham had to change, to depart. The Word of God helps us to distinguish between the two “faces” of change: the first is trust, hope, openness to the new; the second is the difficulty of leaving certainties to head for the unknown. Indeed, it makes us feel calmer to stay in our enclosure, to conserve, to repeat the usual words and gestures – this makes us feel more secure – rather than to go out, to depart and to start up new processes.

Let us ask ourselves, then, what happens if we keep our faith in God and man. We have seen in the story of Abraham the effect of the Lord’s calling: his life changed radically, he entered into a new story, unexpected horizons opened up to him, with new skies and new lands. When one responds to God, one always activates a process: something unexpected happens that leads us where we would never have imagined. This is important: a process is always activated, one goes ahead, one does not occupy spaces, one initiates processes.

Fidelity to man means coming out of oneself to meet the real person, his face, his need for tenderness and mercy, to make him come out of anonymity, from the peripheries of existence. Fidelity to man means opening the eyes and the heart to the poor, the sick, to those who have no work, to the many who are wounded by indifference and by an economy that discards and kills, to open oneself to refugees fleeing violence and war. Fidelity to man means defeating the centripetal force of one's own interests, selfish interests, and making space for passion for the other, rejecting the temptation of desperation and keeping alive the flame of hope.

In such a way, fidelity to God and to man converge in a dynamic movement that takes the form of change in ourselves and change of reality, overcoming immobility and convenience, creating space and work for the young and for their future. Because change is healthy not only when things are going badly, but also when everything works well and we are tempted to make ourselves comfortable with the results obtained. Enlarging our service, participating in other projects, broadening the spaces of creativity, means welcoming the challenge of change precisely to remain faithful to God and to man. It seems to be a contradiction, but fidelity is this path that initiates processes and does not allow us to remain in the spaces that defend us from any creativity, spaces that in the end are of the type: *"it has always been done this way"*.

In sending you this brief message, I address a fraternal greeting to His Excellency Msgr. Zenti, bishop of Verona, city that hosts the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church, to Don Vincenzi and all his colleagues, speakers and volunteers. I hope that this initiative may contribute to inspiring and supporting the evangelizing mission of the Church in the world of work, the economy and politics.

I bless you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
