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Message for the 40th Meeting of Friendship Among Peoples (Rimini, 18-24 August 2019)

To mark the occasion of the fortieth edition of the *Meeting of Friendship Among Peoples*, to be inaugurated tomorrow in Rimini on the theme “Nacque il tuo nome da ciò che fissavi” (“Your name was born from what you gazed upon” 18-24 August 2019), Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin has sent the following message to the bishop of Rimini, H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi, on behalf of the Holy Father Francis:

Message

Vatican City, 16 August 2019

To His Excellency
Msgr. Francesco LAMBIASI
Bishop of Rimini

To Your Most Reverend Excellency,

On the occasion of the 40th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, I am happy to convey to you, to the organizers, to the volunteers and to all the participants the greetings and best wishes of the Supreme Pontiff.

The theme chosen this year is taken from a poem by Saint John Paul II, referring to Veronica, who makes her way through the crowd to dry Jesus' face on the way of the cross: “Your name was born from what you gazed upon” (K. Wojtyła, “III. Il nome [The Name]” in *Id. Tutte le opere letterarie*, Milan 2001, 155). The Servant of God Don Luigi Giussani commented thus this poetic verse: “Let us imagine the crowd, Christ Who passes with the cross, and she who fixes her gaze on Christ and opens up a path in the crowd as she watches him. Everyone watches her. She was faceless, she was a woman like any other, and she acquired a name, that is a face, a

personality in history, and this is why we still remember her, because of that upon which she fixed her eyes ... To love is to affirm the other" (*La convenienza umana della fede*, Milan 2018, 159-160).

"He was seen and therefore saw; [...] unless he had been seen, he would not have been able to see" (Saint Augustine, *Sermons*, 174, 4.4), said Saint Augustine of Zacchaeus. This is the truth that the Church has proclaimed to humanity for two thousand years. Christ loved us; He gave His life for us, for each one of us, to affirm our unique and unrepeatable face. But why is it so important that this proclamation resound anew today? Because so many of our contemporaries fall under the blows of life's trials, and find themselves alone and abandoned. And often they are treated as mere statistics. Think of the thousands of individuals who every day flee from wars and poverty: rather than numbers, they are faces, people, names and stories. We must never forget them, especially when the throwaway culture marginalizes, discriminates and exploits, threatening the dignity of the person.

How many forgotten souls have an urgent need to see the face of the Lord to be able to find themselves! Men and women today often live in uncertainty, walking as if on tenterhooks, alienated from themselves; they no longer seem to have any solidity, to the extent that fear easily overcomes them. But what hope, then, can there be in this world? How can men and women rediscover themselves and find hope again? We cannot do so only through reason or strategies. Here, then, is the secret of life, which brings us out of our anonymity: fixing our gaze on the face of Jesus and acquiring familiarity with Him. Looking at Jesus purifies our vision and prepares us to look at everything with new eyes. By encountering Jesus, looking at the Son of Man, the poor and the simple rediscover themselves, to feel they are loved deeply by a Love without measure. Think of when the Unnamed of *The Betrothed* find himself before the cardinal Federigo who embraces him: "The Unnamed freed himself from that embrace, put one hand over his eyes, and raised his face, saying: 'O truly great and truly merciful God! Now I know myself, now I understand what I am!'" (Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, Penguin Classics, London 1972, 418). We too have been looked upon, chosen and embraced, as the prophet Ezekiel reminds us in the wonderful allegory of a love story with his people: "You were the daughter of foreigners, you were rejected; but then I passed by and cleansed you and you became mine" (cf. *Ez* 16). We too were "foreigners", and the Lord came and gave us a name and an identity.

In an age in which people are often faceless, anonymous figures, as they have no-one on whom they can fix their eyes, Saint John Paul II's poem reminds us that we exist only inasmuch as we are in relationship. Pope Francis likes to highlight this by referring to the Gospel account of the calling of Matthew: "On a day like any other, as Matthew, the tax collector, was seated at his table, Jesus passed by, saw him, came up to him and said 'Follow me'. Matthew got up and followed Him. Jesus looked at him. How strong was the look of love in that look of Jesus, which moved Matthew to do what he did! What power must have been in His eyes to make Matthew get up from his table! ... Jesus stopped; He did not quickly turn away. He looked at Matthew calmly, peacefully. He looked at him with eyes of mercy, He looked at him as no-one had ever looked at him before. And that look unlocked Matthew's heart; it set him free, it healed him, it gave him hope, a new life" (*Homily*, Plaza de la Revolución, Holguín [Cuba], 21 September 2015).

This is what makes the Christian presence in the world different from all others, as a Christian proclaims what the men and women of our time – without realizing it – thirst for the most: the One who is the hope of life is among us. We will be "original" if our faces mirror that of the Risen Christ. And this will be possible if we grow in the awareness that Jesus invited in His disciples, for instance that time after He sent them out on a mission: "The seventy-two returned rejoicing", for the miracles they performed, but Jesus told them instead to "rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (*Lk* 10: 20-21). This is the greatest miracle. This is the origin of the profound joy that nothing and no-one can take from us: our name is written in heaven, and not because of our merits, but because of a gift each of us received with Baptism. A gift that we are called to share with everyone, excluding no-one. This is what it means to be missionary disciples.

The Holy Father hopes that the Meeting may always be a place of welcome, where people can "fix their eyes upon faces", in an experience of their own unmistakable identities. It is the most beautiful way to celebrate this anniversary, looking ahead without nostalgia or fear, always sustained by the presence of Jesus, immersed in His body which is the Church. May the grateful memory of these four decades of tireless effort and creative apostolic work inspire new energy for this witness of faith, open to the vast horizons of today's urgent needs.

His Holiness invokes the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, and wholeheartedly imparts his apostolic blessing upon Your Excellency and the entire community of the Meeting.

I add my own personal greetings and take this opportunity to convey my respectful wishes.

Devotedly in the Lord

Pietro Cardinal Parolin

Secretary of State
