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Video Message of the Holy Father for the 58th General Assembly of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to participants in the 58th General Assembly of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, taking place online on the theme "The pillar of the Word of God - the Biblical inspiration of pastoral care" (12-16 April 2021):

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate:

On the occasion of the 58th General Assembly of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, I would like to address you, and forgive me for doing so in Spanish, but between Brazil and Argentina there is a language that we all understand and that is "portuñol", so you will understand me. And through you I would like to address all Brazilians, at a time when this beloved country is facing one of the most difficult trials in its history.

I would like, first of all, to express my closeness to the hundreds of thousands of families mourning the loss of a loved one. Young and old, fathers and mothers, doctors and volunteers, holy ministers, rich and poor: the pandemic has excluded no one in its wake of suffering. I am thinking in particular of the bishops who died victims of Covid. I ask God to grant the deceased eternal rest and to give comfort to the sorrowful hearts of their families, who often have not even been able to say goodbye to their loved ones. And this leaving without being able to say goodbye, this leaving in the most destitute loneliness is one of the greatest sorrows of those who leave and of those who stay behind.

Dear brothers, the proclamation of the victory of the Lord Jesus over death and sin still resounds among us. The Easter proclamation is a proclamation that renews hope in our hearts: we cannot give up! As we sing in the Easter Sunday Sequence: "Life and death fought in a singular battle / And when life is dead, he rises triumphant". Yes, dear brothers and sisters, he who has triumphed is at our side! Christ has conquered! He has conquered death! Let us renew the hope that life will triumph!

Our faith in the risen Christ shows us that we can overcome this tragic moment. Our hope gives us the courage to get up. Charity urges us to weep with those who weep and to lend a hand, especially to those most in need, so that they may smile again. And charity urges us as bishops to divest ourselves. Do not be afraid to divest yourselves. Everyone knows what it takes. It is possible to overcome the pandemic, it is possible to overcome its consequences. But we can only do so if we are united. The Bishops' Conference must be as one at this time, because the suffering people are one.

During my unforgettable visit to Brazil in 2013, referring to the story of *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, I commented that this image, which was found broken, could serve as a symbol of the situation in Brazil: "What had been broken is restored and becomes one. ... In Aparecida, from the beginning, God's message was one of restoring what was broken, reuniting what had been divided. Walls, chasms, differences which still exist today are destined to disappear. The Church cannot neglect this lesson: she is called to be a means of reconciliation" (*Address to the Bishops of Brazil, 27 July 2013*).

To be an instrument of reconciliation, to be an instrument of unity. This is the mission of the Church in Brazil, nowadays more than ever! And for this, it is necessary to put aside divisions, disagreements. It is necessary to meet in what is essential. With Christ, through Christ and in Christ, in order to rediscover "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph 4:3*). Only in this way will you, as Pastors of the People of God, be able to inspire not only the Catholic faithful, but also other Christians, and other men and women of good will, at all levels of society, even at the institutional and governmental level, to work together to overcome not only the coronavirus, but also another virus, which has long infected humanity: the virus of indifference, which is born of selfishness and generates social injustice.

Dear brothers, the challenge is great. However, we know that the Lord walks with us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28: 20*), he tells us. Therefore, in the certainty that "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (*2 Tim 1:7*), "let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (*cf. Heb 12:1-2*). Always Jesus! He is our foundation, our strength, our unity.

I pray to the risen Lord that this General Assembly will bear fruits of unity and reconciliation for all the Brazilian people, and in the Episcopal Conference. Unity that is not uniformity, but rather harmony, that harmonious unity that only the Holy Spirit gives. I implore *Nossa Senhora Aparecida* that she, as Mother, may obtain for all her children the grace to be custodians of the good and the life of others, and promoters of fraternity.

To each one of you, dear brothers, brother Bishops, to the faithful entrusted to you and to all the inhabitants of Brazil, I give you my heartfelt blessing. And please do not forget to pray for me. *O Senhor vos abençoe.*
