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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 210823a

Monday 23.08.2021

Message of the Holy Father Francis signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin on the occasion of the 71st National Liturgical Week (Cremona, 23-26 August 2021)

On the occasion of the 71st National Liturgical Week, commencing today in Cremona, the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin has sent a Message to the President of the Centre for Liturgical Action, Bishop Claudio Maniago, on behalf of the Holy Father Francis.

The following is the message, which was read by Bishop Maniago at the opening of the event:

Message

Most Reverend Excellency,

In the happy circumstance of the 71st National Liturgical Week, which will take place in the city of Cremona from 23 to 26 August, the Holy Father Francis is pleased to send His auspicious word to you, the collaborators of the Centre for Liturgical Action, the hosting diocese and its pastor and all those who will take part in these important days of study.

The Supreme Pontiff joins in the common thanksgiving to the Lord, since this year it is possible to hold the event, after the sad moment of last year, when, following the well-known conditions imposed by the pandemic, it had to be postponed. This painful decision has, however, made it possible to confirm in a new light the chosen theme, which is intended to study further some aspects and situations of celebration, which have been severely tested by the onset and spread of Covid 19 and the restrictions which have been necessary to contain it.

Indeed, the theme you will be dealing with concerns the gathering *in unum* of the Lord's disciples to carry out His command to "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19c): "WHERE ARE TWO OR THREE GATHERED IN MY NAME..." (Mt 18:20). *Communities, liturgies and territories*. The weekly gathering in the "name of the Lord", which from the very beginning has been perceived by Christians as indispensable and indissolubly linked to their identity, was severely affected during the most acute phase of the spread of the pandemic. But love for the Lord

and pastoral creativity pushed pastors and lay faithful to explore other ways of nourishing the communion of faith and love with the Lord and with their brothers and sisters, while waiting to be able to return to the fullness of the Eucharistic celebration in peace and security. It was a difficult and painful wait, illuminated by the mystery of the Lord's Cross and fruitful in many works of care, fraternal love and service to the people who suffered most from the consequences of the health emergency.

The sad experience of last year's liturgical "fast" highlighted the goodness of the long journey that has been made since the Second Vatican Council, along the path mapped out by the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The time of privation made it possible to perceive "the importance of the divine liturgy for the life of Christians, who find therein that objective mediation required by the fact that Jesus Christ is not an idea or a sentiment, but a living Person, and his Mystery a historical event. The prayer of Christians passes through tangible mediations: Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments, liturgical rites, the community. In Christian life, the corporeal and material sphere cannot be disregarded, because in Jesus Christ it became the way of salvation. We could say that we should pray with the body too: the body enters into prayer." (Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 3 February 2021).

The liturgy "suspended" during the long period of confinement, and the difficulties of the subsequent resumption, confirmed what had already been found in the Sunday assemblies of the Italian peninsula, an alarming indication of the advanced stage of the change of epoch. We observe how in people's real lives the very perception of time and, consequently, of Sunday itself, of space, has changed, with repercussions on the way of being and feeling as a community, people, family and of the relationship with the territory. The Sunday assembly thus finds itself unbalanced in terms of generational presence, cultural inhomogeneity, and the difficulty of finding a harmonious integration in parish life, to be the true summit of all its activities and source of missionary dynamism to bring the Gospel of mercy to the geographical and existential peripheries.

The Holy Father hopes that the National Liturgical Week, with its proposals for reflection and moments of celebration, albeit in the integrated mode, both in person and by telematic means, may identify and suggest some lines of liturgical pastoral care to be offered to parishes, so that Sunday, the Eucharistic assembly, the ministries and the rite may emerge from the marginality towards which they seem inexorably to precipitate, and to recover their centrality in the faith and spirituality of believers. The recent publication of the third edition of the Roman Missal and the willingness of the Italian Bishops to accompany it with a robust revival of the liturgical formation of God's holy people augurs well in this direction.

His Holiness greets with joy the celebration of the 71st National Liturgical Week, which is being held in an area that has suffered greatly as a result of the pandemic and which has seen so much good flourish in order to alleviate this immense suffering. He assures you of his prayers and heartily imparts the Apostolic Blessing to Your Excellency, to the Bishop of the host diocese, His Excellency Archbishop Antonio Napolioni, to the other bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated persons, and to the speakers and all the participants.

In adding my personal good wishes, I take advantage of the occasion to confirm my homage to

Your Most Reverend Excellency.

Pietro Card. Parolin

Secretary of State
