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Audience with the Bishops, Friends of the Focolare Movement

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Bishops, Friends of the Focolare Movement, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters

I greet you all with affection, and I thank you for requesting this meeting, even though most of you are participating from afar. But we are close, indeed united in the one Body and the one Spirit!

I greet Cardinal Francis Xavier Kovithavanij, who was unable to come due to illness: let us pray for his rapid recovery! And I thank the bishops who have presented the experience of these meetings of yours, which began forty years ago. A path of friendship that has a strong root, a solid root. I would like to reflect briefly on this with you.

The *Opera di Maria*, or Focolare Movement, has always cultivated, through the charism received from its founder Chiara Lubich, the sense and service of unity: unity in the Church, unity among all believers, and unity throughout the world, “in concentric circles”. This makes us think of the definition of the Church given by the Second Vatican Council: “the sacrament or sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1). In the midst of the lacerations and destructions of war, the Spirit placed in Chiara’s young heart a seed of fraternity, a seed of communion. A seed that developed and grew from that group of friends in Trento, attracting men and women of every language and nation with the power of God’s love, which creates unity without annulling diversity, on the contrary, enhancing and harmonising it. The words of Basil (of Caesarea), the Spirit, come to mind: “*Ipse unitas est, ipse est harmonia*”.

The “kinship” - so to speak - between this charism and the ministry of the bishops is evident. We bishops are at

the service of the people of God, so that it may be built up in the unity of faith, hope and charity. The Holy Spirit imprints in the heart of the bishop the will of the Lord Jesus: that all Christians may be one, to the praise and glory of the Triune God and that the world may believe in Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn 17:21*). Pope, and bishops, we are at the service not of an external unity, of a “uniformity”: rather, of the mystery of communion that is the Church in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the Church as a living Body, as a people journeying in history, and at the same time beyond history. A people sent into the world to bear witness to Christ, so that He, *Lumen gentium*, Light of the Gentiles, may draw everyone to Him, with the gentle and merciful power of His Paschal Mystery.

Dear brothers and sisters, this, we can say, is God's “dream”. It is His plan to reconcile [he says: reconciliation] and harmonise everything and everyone in Christ (cf. *Eph 1:10; Col 1:20*). This is also the “dream” of fraternity, to which I dedicated the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. In the face of the “shadows of a closed world”, where so many dreams of unity are being shattered, where a project for all is lacking and globalisation is drifting without a common course”, where the scourge of the pandemic risks exacerbating inequalities, the Spirit calls us to have the boldness - the *parrhesia* - of being one, as the title of your meeting says. Dare to be one. Starting from the awareness that unity is a gift - that is the other part of the title.

Il coraggio dell'unità ce lo testimoniano soprattutto i santi: pochi giorni fa abbiamo celebrato San Cornelio, Papa, e San Cipriano, vescovo. Proprio a quest'ultimo dobbiamo la stupenda definizione della Chiesa come «popolo adunato nell'unità del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo» (*De Orat. Dom. 23: PL 4, 553*). Ma pensiamo anche a tanti testimoni dei nostri tempi, pastori e laici, che hanno avuto “l'audacia dell'unità”, pagando di persona un prezzo a volte molto alto. Perché l'unità che ci ha donato e ci dona Gesù Cristo non è unanimità, non è andare d'accordo a tutti i costi: no. Obbedisce a un criterio fondamentale, che è il rispetto della persona, il rispetto del volto dell'altro, specialmente del povero, del piccolo, dell'escluso.

Cari fratelli e sorelle, vi ringrazio ancora di questo incontro. Soprattutto vi ringrazio per l'impegno con cui portate avanti questo cammino di amicizia – mi raccomando: sempre aperto, mai esclusivo –, per crescere nel servizio alla comunione. Continuate a sorridere, che è parte del vostro carisma. Prego per voi e per le vostre comunità. Il Signore vi benedica e la Madonna vi custodisca. E, per favore, non dimenticatevi di pregare per me.

The saints, above all, bear witness to the courage of unity: a few days ago we celebrated Saint Cornelius, Pope, and Saint Cyprian, Bishop. We owe to the latter the wonderful definition of the Church as “a people gathered together in the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*De Orat. Dom. 23: PL 4, 553*). But let us also think of so many witnesses of our times, pastors and lay people, who have had the “boldness of unity”, paying in person a price that was at times very high. Because the unity that Jesus Christ gave us and continues to give us is not unanimity, it is not agreeing at all costs: no, it is not. It obeys a fundamental criterion, which is respect for the person, respect for the face of the other, especially the poor, the small, the excluded.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you again for this meeting. Above all, I thank you for the commitment with which you have pursued this path of friendship – remember, it should always be open, never exclusive - in order to grow in the service of communion. Keep smiling, which is part of your charism. I pray for you and for your communities. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me.

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless us all. Amen.
