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Letter of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Omella Omella on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the conversion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

The following is the letter sent by the Holy Father Francis to His Eminence Cardinal Juan José Omella Omella, archbishop of Barcelona, Spain, and president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of the celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the conversion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in Spain, to be attended by the civil and religious authorities of the Spanish region, along with the Propositor General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal:

Letter of the Holy Father

To His Eminence Cardinal Juan José Omella Omella

Archbishop of Barcelona and President of the

Spanish Episcopal Conference

Dear brother:

Next 14 November a singular event will be celebrated in Barcelona, the 500th anniversary of the arrival of a poor soldier in a geographically remote place in Spain, when he was on his way to the Holy Land. Our protagonist, after having served the king and his convictions to the point of shedding his blood, was wounded in body and spirit, he had stripped himself of everything and was determined to follow Christ in poverty and humility. It mattered little to him at that time whether he stayed in paupers' lodgings or had to withdraw into a cave to pray; least of all that this meant being "esteemed vain and mad" (*S.E.* 167). And yet - as fate would have it - five centuries later, the civil and religious authorities of that region, together with the Superior General of the religious institute he founded, the Society of Jesus, are coming together in an institutional way to celebrate this event.

I also wish to join in this event, which is why I wanted you to represent me, asking you to convey my greetings to all the authorities present, both civil and ecclesiastical, and through them to the faithful People of God, who remember Saint Ignatius of Loyola with devotion and affection, and to the people of good will who respect him for being a man of integrity and coherent in his convictions. Likewise, to the members of the Society of Jesus who, like me, venerate him as their founder.

It is meaningful at this time to think that God used a war and a plague to bring him there. The war that brought him out of the siege of Pamplona and was the trigger for his conversion, and the plague that prevented him from reaching Barcelona and kept him in the cave of Manresa. This is a great lesson for us, for we are not lacking in wars and plagues before we are converted. We can, therefore, take them as an opportunity to reverse the course we have followed so far and invest in what really matters, whatever the field in which we work. Through crises, God tells us that we are not the masters of History, with a capital letter, not even of our own histories, and although we are free to respond or not to the calls of his grace, it is always his plan of love that guides the world.

In that circumstance, Ignatius was docile to that call, but more importantly, he did not keep this grace to himself, but saw it from the beginning as a gift to others, as a way, a method that could help others to encounter God, to open their hearts and allow themselves to be challenged by Him. Since then, his spiritual exercises, like other itineraries of perfection, such as the twelve degrees of humility of Saint Benedict, the abodes of Saint Teresa, or more simply those proposed to us by the beatitudes or the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are presented to us as that Jacob’s ladder which leads from earth to heaven, and which Jesus promises to those who sincerely seek him.

May the Lord bless you, dear brother, may he bless the People on pilgrimage in those lands, and may the Holy Virgin watch over them. And please do not forget to pray for me.

Fraternally,

FRANCIS

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 12 September 2022