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Pastoral Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Trieste on the occasion of the 50th Italian Catholic Social Week – Meeting with Congress Participants

This morning, after leaving Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis transferred to the Vatican heliport, from where he departed at 6.30 to begin his pastoral visit to Trieste on the occasion of the fiftieth Italian Catholic Social Week, taking place from 3 to 7 July on the theme “At the heart of democracy: Participation between history and future”.

Upon arrival, at 7.54, after landing at the “Generali Convention Center”, the Pope was received by His Eminence Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, metropolitan archbishop of Bologna, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference; Archbishop Luigi Renna of Catania, president of the Organizing Committee of the Social Weeks; Bishop Enrico Trevisi of Trieste; the Honorable Massimiliano Fedriga, president of the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia Region; His Excellency Mr. Pietro Signoriello, prefect of Trieste; Mr. Roberto Dipiazza, mayor of Trieste; and Dr. Philippe Donnet, chief executive officer of “Generali”.

The Pope then entered the Generali Convention Center, where he met with approximately 1,200 congress participants, at the conclusion of the fiftieth Italian Catholic Social Week.

After the greeting from His Eminence Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi and the introduction from Archbishop Luigi Renna, the Holy Father delivered his address.

At the end of the address, while the participants in the Italian Catholic Social Week transferred to Piazza Unità d’Italia for the celebration of Holy Mass, Pope Francis briefly met with some ecumenical representatives, members of the academic world, and a group of migrants and disabled people.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished Authorities,

dear brother Bishops,

Cardinals,

brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank Cardinal Zuppi and Archbishop Baturi for inviting me to share this concluding session with you. I greet Archbishop Renna and the Scientific and Organizing Committee of Catholic Social Weeks. On behalf of everyone, I express gratitude to Bishop Trevisi for the hospitality of the Diocese of Trieste.

The first time that I heard about Trieste was from my grandfather who had been at Piave in 1914. He taught us many songs and one of them was on Trieste: “General Cadorna wrote to the queen: ‘If you want to see Trieste, look at a postcard’”. And that was the first time I had heard any mention of the city.

This was the 50th Italian Catholic Social Week. The history of the “Weeks” is intertwined with the history of Italy, and this says a lot. It speaks of a Church that is sensitive to the transformations of society and eager to contribute to the common good. Building on this experience, you have delved into a very timely theme: “At the Heart of Democracy: Participation throughout history and into the future”.

Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo, who initiated this event in 1907, stated that democracy can be defined as “that civil order in which all social, legal, and economic forces, in the fullness of their hierarchical development, cooperate proportionally for the common good, ultimately benefiting the lower classes predominantly”.1 This is what Toniolo said. In light of this definition — let’s be honest — it is evident that democracy is not in good health in today’s world. This concerns and worries us because the well-being of mankind is at stake, and nothing human can be alien to us.2

In Italy, the democratic system developed after World War ii, partly thanks to Catholics’ decisive contribution. We can be proud of this history, which was also influenced by the experience of the Social Weeks. And without idealizing the past, we should learn from it, in order to take on the responsibility of building something good in our own time. This attitude can be found in the pastoral note with which the Italian Bishops restored the Social Weeks in 1988. I quote the objectives: “To give meaning to everyone’s commitment to the transformation of society; to pay attention to people who remain outside or on the margins of successful economic processes and mechanisms; to give space to social solidarity in all its forms; to support the return of an ethic concerned with the common good; [...] to give meaning to the development of the country, understood [...] as an overall improvement in the quality of life, collective coexistence, democratic participation, and authentic freedom”.3 End of quote.

This vision, rooted in the Social Doctrine of the Church, embraces certain dimensions of Christian commitment and a Gospel reading of social phenomena that are not only relevant to the Italian context but also represent a warning for the entire human society and for the journey of all peoples. Indeed, just as the crisis of democracy affects different realities and nations, so too does the attitude of responsibility towards social transformations call all Christians, wherever they live and work, in every part of the world.

There is an image that sums up all this, which you have chosen as the symbol of this event: *the heart* . From this image, I propose two reflections to nourish the path ahead.

In the first one, we can think about the *crisis of democracy* as a *wounded heart* . That which limits participation is right before our eyes. If corruption and illegality reveal a “heart attack”, then different forms of social exclusion must also be a concern. Every time someone is marginalized, the whole social body suffers. The throwaway culture creates a city where there is no place for the poor, the unborn, people who are vulnerable, the sick, children, women, young people and the elderly. This is what the throwaway culture is like. Power becomes self-

referential — this is a bad illness — incapable of listening and serving people. Aldo Moro reminded us that “a state is not truly democratic if it is not at the service of humanity, if it does not have the dignity, freedom, and autonomy of the human person as its supreme goal, if it does not respect those social formations in which the human person freely develops and integrates his personality”.4

The very word “democracy” does not simply coincide with the vote of the people. Meanwhile, I am concerned about the decline in the number of people voting. What does this mean? It is not just the people’s vote, but rather it requires creating the conditions that allow everyone to express themselves and participate. Participation cannot be improvised: it is learned from childhood, and young people must be “trained” even to develop a critical sense regarding ideological and populist temptations. In this perspective, as I recalled years ago while visiting the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, it is important to highlight “the contribution which Christianity can offer to the cultural and social development of Europe today within the context of a correct relationship between religion and society”,5 by promoting fruitful dialogue with the civil community and political institutions so that, illuminating each other and freeing ourselves from the dross of ideology, we can start a common reflection especially on issues related to human life and the dignity of the person.

Ideologies are seductive. Some compare them to the pied piper of Hamelin; they seduce, but they lead you to drown yourself.

For this purpose, the principles of *solidarity* and *subsidiarity* remain fruitful. Indeed, a people holds together through the bonds that constitute it, and these bonds are strengthened when each person is valued. Each person has value; each person is important. Democracy always requires the transition from *partisanship* to *participation* , from “cheering” to dialogue. “‘Only when our economic and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside, will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity’. A truly human and fraternal society will be capable of ensuring in an efficient and stable way that each of its members is accompanied at every stage of life. Not only by providing for their basic needs, but by enabling them to give the best of themselves, even though their performance may be less than optimum, their pace slow or their efficiency limited”.6 Everyone should feel part of a community project; no one should feel useless. Certain forms of welfare that do not recognize people’s dignity ... I will pause at the word welfare. Welfarism, just on its own, is the enemy of democracy, the enemy of love for neighbour. And some forms of welfarism that do not recognize the dignity of people are social hypocrisy. Let’s not forget this. And what is behind this ‘keeping a distance from social reality’? Indifference, and indifference is a cancer of democracy, a non-participation.

The second reflection is an encouragement to *participate* so that democracy may resemble a *healed heart* . This is it: I like to think that in social life, there is a great need to heal hearts, to heal hearts. A healed heart. Creativity is needed for this. If we look around, we see many signs of the Holy Spirit’s action in the lives of families and communities, even in the fields of economics, ideology, politics, and society. Let us think of those who have made room within an economic activity for people with disabilities; workers who have given up a right to prevent the dismissal of others; renewable energy communities promoting integral ecology, also taking care of families facing energy poverty; administrators who support birth rates, work, school, educational services, accessible housing, mobility for all, and integration of migrants. All these things are not part of politics without participation. The heart of politics is participation. And these are the things that make participation: taking care of the whole, not just charity, but taking care of the whole, taking care of this ... no, of the whole!

Fraternity makes social relationships flourish; and on the other hand, taking care of each other requires the courage to think of ourselves as a single people. It takes courage to think of oneself as a people, not as I or my clan, my family, my friend. Unfortunately, this category — “people” — is often misunderstood and “could lead to the elimination of the very notion of democracy as ‘government by the people’. If we wish to maintain that society is more than a mere aggregate of individuals, the term ‘people’ proves necessary”,7 which is not the same as populism. No, it is something else: the people. Indeed, “it is extremely difficult to carry out a long-term project unless it becomes a collective aspiration”.8 A democracy with a healed heart continues to cultivate dreams for the future, engages, and calls for personal and community involvement. Dream of the future. Do not fear that.

Let us not be deceived by easy solutions. Let us instead be passionate about the common good. Our task is not

to manipulate the word democracy or to distort it with empty titles capable of justifying any action. Democracy is not an empty box; rather, it is linked to the values of the person, fraternity, and integral ecology.

As Catholics, in this context, we cannot be content with a marginal or private faith. This does not mean demanding to be heard, but above all, having the courage to make proposals for justice and peace in the public debate. We have something to say, but not to defend privileges. No. We must be a voice, a voice that denounces and offers solutions in a society that is often voiceless and in which too many have no voice. There are many who have no voice. Many. This is political love.9 It does not settle for treating symptoms but seeks to address the root causes. It is a form of charity that allows politics to rise to its responsibilities and move beyond polarizations, these polarizations which impoverish and do not help to understand and confront challenges. This political charity is a call to the entire Christian community, with its different ministries and charisms. Let us train ourselves in this love, to circulate it in a world that is lacking in civil passion. We have to reclaim our civil passion, that of the great politicians we have known. Let us learn to always better walk together as God's people, to be leaven of participation among the people to which we belong. And this is important in our political actions, even those of our shepherds: to know the people, to draw near to the people. A politician can be like a shepherd who goes before the people, in the midst of the people and behind the people. In front of the people to set the pace of the journey; in the midst of the people to know the people; behind the people to help the slower ones. A politician who does not know the people, is theoretical. He is lacking the main thing.

Giorgio La Pira had contemplated the protagonism of cities, which do not have the power to make wars but pay the highest price for them. He envisioned a system of "bridges" between the cities of the world to create opportunities for unity and dialogue. Following La Pira's example, the Italian Catholic laity should not lack the ability to "organize hope": This is your task, to organize. Also organizing peace and good political projects that can be revived from the grassroots. Why not revive, support, and multiply efforts for social and political formation starting with young people? Why not share the richness of the Church's social teaching? We can foresee places for discussion and dialogue and foster synergies for the common good. If the synodal process has trained us in community discernment, let the horizon of the Jubilee see us active, pilgrims of hope, for the Italy of tomorrow. As disciples of the Risen One, let us never cease to nourish trust, in the certainty that time is greater than space. Let us not forget this. We often think that political work involves taking up spaces. No. It means betting on time, initiating processes, not taking up room. Time is superior to space, and let us not forget that starting processes is wiser than occupying spaces. I hope you will have the courage to always initiate processes in your social life. It is creativity and also the law of life. When a woman gives birth to a baby, she begins a process and accompanies it. We too have to do the same in politics.

This is the role of the Church: to involve in hope because without it, we may manage the present, but we do not build the future. Without hope, we would be administrators, like tight rope walkers of the present, rather than prophets and builders of the future.

Brothers and sisters, I thank you for your commitment. I bless you and hope you will be artisans of democracy and contagious witnesses of participation. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

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1 Cf. G. Toniolo, *Christian Democracy. Concepts and Guidelines* , I, Vatican City 1949, p. 29.

2 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes* , 1.

3 Cf. Italian Bishops' Conference, *Restoration and Renewal of the Social Weeks of Italian Catholics* , November 20, 1988, no. 4.

4 Cf. A. Moro, *The End Goal is Man* , Edizioni di Comunità, Rome 2018, p. 25.

5*Speech to the Council of Europe* , Strasbourg, November 25, 2014.

6 Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti, 110.

7 Ibid, 157.

8 Ibid,

9 Ibid, 180-182.