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Message of the Holy Father Francis, signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, on the occasion of the 45th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples (Rimini, 20 to 25 August 2024)

On the occasion of the 45th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, to take place in Rimini from 20 to 25 August 2024, on the theme “*If we are not after the essence, then what are we after?*”, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin has sent the following message on behalf of the Holy Father Francis to Bishop Nicolò Anselmi of Rimini:

Message

His Most Reverend Excellency
Bishop NICOLÒ ANSELM
of Rimini

From the Vatican, 19 July 2024

Your Most Reverend Excellency,

On the occasion of the 45th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, the Holy Father wishes to send a message of good wishes to the participants, greeting the organizers, the volunteers and all those who will take part in the event, whose title represents a heartfelt appeal to responsibility: “*If we are not after the essence, then what are we after?*”.

Especially as we are going through complex times, the search for what constitutes the heart of the mystery of life and reality is of crucial importance. Indeed, our age is marked by various problems and considerable challenges, in the face of which we sometimes find a sense of impotence, a renunciatory and passive attitude that can lead to “dragging one’s feet” and allowing oneself to be swept away by the daze of the ephemeral, to the point of losing the meaning of existence. In this scenario, therefore, the choice to set out on the trail of what is essential is all the more pertinent.

Pope Francis therefore encourages the attempt to search, with passion and enthusiasm, for what brings out the beauty of life, confronting the question posed by Don Luigi Giussani when he courageously stated: “The heart is worn by hardening, or rather the loss of passion and the taste for living. ... To be old at twenty and even earlier, to be old at fifteen years of age, this is the characteristic feature of today’s world” (*Il senso religioso*, Milan 2013, 116-117).

As the icy winds of war blow, joining with recurrent phenomena of injustice, violence and inequality, as well as the grave climate crisis and unprecedented anthropological change, it is essential to stop and ask ourselves: is there something worth living and hoping for?

Ever since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has urged us to read even the resistance, hardships and failings of today’s men and women as a call to reflection, so that the heart may open to the encounter with God and each person may become aware of himself, his neighbour, and reality.

His constant invitation is to become *beggars of the essential*, of what gives meaning to our life, first of all by divesting ourselves of what weighs down our daily life, following the example of a climber who, on the rock face, must rid himself of excess in order to be able to climb more rapidly. By doing so, we discover that the value of human existence does not consist in things, in successes achieved, in the race of competition, but first and foremost in that relationship of love that sustains us, rooting our journey in trust and hope: it is the friendship with God, which is then reflected in all other human relations, that is the foundation of the joy that will never fail. We are beloved, this is the essential truth, that Don Giussani himself announced to young university students: “You are loved. This is the message that arrives in your life. ... This is Jesus Christ in the history of humankind, the continuous beginning of this message: ‘You are loved!’ What is life? Being loved. And our being? Being loved. And destiny? Being loved” (*Litterae Communionis Tracce*, 1996, no. 1).

On the same wavelength, Pope Francis recalls that “what is essential, most beautiful, most attractive and at the same time most necessary for us is faith in Jesus Christ” (*Address at the Plenary Session of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 26 January 2024). Indeed, only the Lord saves our fragile humanity and, in the midst of adversity, lets us experience an otherwise impossible joy. Without this anchorage point, the boat that is our life would be at the mercy of the waves and at risk of sinking.

To return to the essential that is Jesus does not mean escaping from reality but, on the contrary, it is the condition to truly immerse oneself in history, to face it without fleeing its challenges, to find the courage to risk and to love even when it does not seem worth the effort, to live in the world without any fear. As the then-Archbishop Montini wrote, “You are necessary to us, O Christ, O Lord, O God-with-us, to learn true love and to walk in the joy and strength of your charity, along the path of our arduous life” (*Omnia nobis est Christus. Pastoral letter to the archdiocese of Milan for Lent 1955*).

In this spirit, then, the Holy Father appreciates and shares the aims of the forthcoming Meeting, because focusing on the essential helps us to take our life into our own hands and to make it an instrument of love, mercy and compassion, becoming a sign of blessing for our neighbour. Faced with the temptation of discouragement, the complexity of the current crisis and, in particular, the challenge of a seemingly impossible peace, the Holy Father urges everyone to become responsible agents of change, actively collaborating in the Church’s mission, to give life together to places where Christ’s presence can be seen and touched. This joint commitment can give rise to a new world, where the Love that was manifested to us in Christ may finally triumph, and the entire planet may become a temple of fraternity.

Pope Francis hopes that the Meeting’s rich programme, in its multiple proposals and languages, may inspire in many the desire to be seekers of the essential and to make the passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, source of liberation from all slavery and force that heals and transforms humanity, flourish in hearts. To all, organizers, volunteers and participants, He heartily sends his blessing, asking you to please pray for him.

In adding my personal good wishes as well, I avail myself of the circumstance to confirm my distinguished reverence to

Your Most Reverend Excellency

Pietro Cardinal Parolin
Secretary of State
