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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 6th centenary of the arrival of the Gitano people in Spain

The following is the text of the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Gitano people of Spain, on the occasion of the sixth centenary of their arrival in the country (January 1425-2025):

Message of the Holy Father

Dear cousins, uncles and aunts,

Dear Gitano people of Spain:

In 2025 we commemorate six hundred years of your presence in Spain. I would like to take this opportunity to show you my affection, to acknowledge your values and to encourage you to face the future with hope.

I am aware that your history has been marked by misunderstanding, rejection and marginalization. But even in the hardest moments, you have discovered the closeness of God. Indeed, God is a pilgrim in history with humanity and has become a nomad with the Gitano people. The Infant Emmanuel - as you call *God with us* - was also born in Bethlehem under the sign of persecution and itinerancy.

It is also right to acknowledge the efforts made in recent decades by the Gitano population, by the Church and by Spanish society as a whole, to embark on a new path towards an inclusion that respects your signs of identity. This path has borne much fruit, but we must continue to work, because there are still prejudices to overcome and painful situations to face: families in need who do not know how to help their children with problems, *chavorillos* who have difficulty studying, young people who cannot find decent jobs, women who suffer discrimination in their families and in society.

I would like to echo in your hearts that unforgettable message delivered by Saint Paul VI in Pomezia in 1965

before thousands of Gitanos from all over the world: “You are at the heart of the Church”. You are beloved daughters and sons of God. You are beloved children of Saint Mary, the *Majarí Cali*, to whom you turn for shelter and protection.

You are children of the Church, of this Church in which many people, gypsies and payas, have committed themselves with responsibility and affection for the integral development of the gypsy people; of this Church that wishes to continue opening its doors wide, so that we can all feel at home in it; a Church in which you can grow in your Christian faith without renouncing the best values of your culture. Thank you to all those who have worked and continue to work so hard to make this desire an ever more evident reality. God does not allow himself to be outdone in generosity and will make the affection and time that you dedicate to the Pastoral with Gypsies bear fruit.

You are children of the Church, of this Church in which many people, Gitanos and *payos* alike, have committed themselves with responsibility and affection for the integral development of the Gitano people; of this Church that wishes to continue opening its doors wide, so that we can all feel at home in it; a Church in which you can grow in your Christian faith without renouncing the best values of your culture. Thank you to all those who have worked and continue to work so hard to make this desire an ever more evident reality. God does not allow himself to be outdone in generosity and will ensure that the affection and time that you dedicate to the pastoral care of Gitanos bear fruit.

The Church has rediscovered, in the celebration of the recent Synod, the importance of walking together. Walk together with your bishops, with the heads of delegations and secretariats of Gitano ministry, in your parishes and in the confraternities and associations in which you participate. Walk together from the various diocesan realities, with the support of the Pastoral Department of the Spanish Episcopal Conference.

Let us walk together, because in the Church the power of the Gospel will purify and enhance its values and culture. You have much to contribute to the Church and to society: appreciation for the elderly and the sense of family, which grows stronger in times of difficulty; care for creation, represented on your flag by the blue of the sky and the green of the earth; our condition as pilgrims to the homeland of heaven, symbolized by the wheel of the chariot on which your ancestors travelled; the ability to maintain joy and to celebrate even when there are storm clouds on the horizon; the meaning of work - so often misunderstood - as a means to live and not so much to accumulate. Many of the values that identify you as a people are not only evangelical, but also prophetic and counter-cultural at this time.

Therefore, I invite you to walk together to evangelize, to spread the joy of living the Christian faith, hope and love, especially to young people who have difficulty in finding God inside and outside the Catholic Church. Let us walk together to form communities of “missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24). With your words, commitment and fraternity, be pilgrims of hope for the many people who have lost the joy of living. Show by your experience the closeness of God, who “desires to come *into the little things of our life*; He wants to inhabit our daily lives, the things we do each day at home, in our families, at school and in the workplace. Amid our ordinary lived experience, He wants to do extraordinary things” (Homily at the Holy Mass on Christmas Eve, 2021).

Let us walk together and keep the doors of our communities open to our relatives who no longer celebrate the faith in the Catholic Church, always offering them the friendship and dialogue proper to those of us who are called to live in fraternity, regardless of our differences.

Let us look forward with hope, following in the footsteps of Blessed Emilia Fernández Rodríguez, *La canastera*, and Blessed Ceferino Giménez Malla, *El Pelé*. Although they did not claim to be, they were and continue to be teachers of faith and life for Gitanos, like so many humble people who open their smallness with confidence to the greatness of God. Through the mysteries of the Rosary, both Blesseds remind us of the importance of prayer, of the encounter with God, a source of joy, fraternity, hope and charity. Both risked and lost their lives for love of God and for the good of others: *El Pelé* for defending a priest unjustly arrested, *La canastera* for protecting her catechists. Both were humble and courageous missionaries: Ceferino was a catechist for a group

of children, whom he gathered on the outskirts of the city of Barbastro, and Emilia passed on her faith even to her fellow prisoners in Almería. Finally, Ceferino stands out as a model of fraternity because, in a society as polarized as that of his time, he knew how to foster harmony and solidarity among his people, also mediating in the conflicts that sometimes marred relations between *payos* and Gitanos.

To conclude this message, I would like to endorse the words of your hymn: *Opre Roma isi vaxt akana (Go Gitanos! Now is the time)*. Now is the time to continue to make your way, to offer the best of yourselves, to transmit God's tenderness, which we celebrate and welcome at Christmas. Now is the time to proclaim, with the strength of the Lord Jesus, "the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 128).

Dear Gitano people of Spain, pray for me, I pray for you, may *Undebel* bless you, especially the uncles and aunts who are sick. *Devlesa romá* (God be with the Gitanos).

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 9 December 2024

FRANCIS
