

Vatican City, August 9, 2018

Most Reverend
FRANCESCO LAMBIASI
Bishop of Rimini

Your Excellency,

Once again this year, the Holy Father Pope Francis wishes to express through you his warm greetings to the organizers, volunteers and participants in the 39th *Meeting for Friendship Amongst Peoples*, to which I add my own personal best wishes for the success of the event.

The title of the Meeting, “The forces that move history are the same that make man happy,” echoes Fr. Giussani’s words during the period of the 1968 protests, a crucial turning point for society, the effects of which are still present fifty years later. In fact, as Pope Francis asserted, “today we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change” (*Address of the Holy Father at the Meeting with the participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, November 10, 2015).

The break with the past became the categorical imperative of a generation that placed its hopes in a structural revolution that could ensure greater authenticity of life. Many believers yielded to the fascination of this new perspective, and reduced faith to a moralism that de-emphasized Grace and instead trusted in practical efforts to achieve a better world.

In this context, Fr. Giussani’s words to a young man absorbed in the search for “the forces that dominate history” are significant: “The forces that move history are the same that make man happy” (*The Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen’s 2018, p. 415). Giussani challenged him to verify what forces truly change history, raising the bar for measuring the young man’s revolutionary efforts.

What has become of this effort? What remains of that desire to change everything? This letter is not an adequate forum for a historical analysis, but we can note some indicators that have emerged in the current situation of the West. There is a return to building walls instead of bridges. There is a tendency to be closed to those different from us, rather than open. There is an increase in indifference, rather than in the desire to take initiative to bring about change. A sense of fear prevails over trust for the future. We wonder whether the world has become more livable in this half century.

This question concerns we Christians who have passed through the season of the 1968 protests and now are called to reflect together with many other protagonists and ask ourselves what we have learned. What lessons can we take to heart?

Human beings have always been tempted to think that their intelligence and capabilities are the principles that govern the world. This presumption takes two forms: “One is the attraction of gnosticism [...] which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is [...] the neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 94).

Must Christians necessarily abandon their desire for change if they wish to avoid these two temptations? No. It is not a matter of withdrawing from the world to avoid error, or of keeping faith pure and uncontaminated, because “an authentic faith [...] always involves a deep desire to change the world” (*ibid.*, 183), to move history, as expressed in the title of the Meeting.

Many will ask themselves whether this is possible. Christians cannot give up their dream that the world will change for the better, because it is a reasonable one. This certainty is rooted in the

deep conviction that Christ is the beginning of the new world, as Pope Francis said: “Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. [...] in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life” (*ibid.*, 276).

We have seen this “vital power” at work in many situations throughout history. How can we fail to remember that other epochal change that marked the world? The Holy Father spoke of it in his address to the European Bishops’ Commission last year: “In the twilight of the ancient world, as the glories of Rome fell into the ruins that still amaze us, and new peoples flooded across the borders of the Empire, one young man echoed anew the words of the Psalmist: ‘Who is the man that longs for life and desires to see good days?’ By asking this question in the Prologue of his Rule, Saint Benedict [...] was not concerned about social status, riches or power. He appealed to the nature common to every human being, who, whatever his or her condition, longs for life and desires to see good days.” (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community*, October 28, 2017).

Today, who will save this desire that dwells, albeit confusedly, in the human heart? Only something worthy of the heart’s infinite longing. In fact, if desire does not find an adequate object, it remains paralyzed and no promise or initiative can move it. From this point of view, “it is quite conceivable that the modern age—which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity—may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known.” (H. Arendt, *The human condition*, University of Chicago Press 1998, p. 322).

No effort or revolution can satisfy the human heart. Only God, who created us to have infinite desire, can fill our heart with His infinite presence. This is the reason He became man, so that women and men may encounter He who saves and fulfils the desire for good days, as echoed in a passage from the *Aparecida Document* (June 29, 2007), from the 5th Conference of the Bishops of the Latin American continent and of the Caribbean. In thanking the *Meeting* organizers for the exhibit dedicated to the great Marian Shrine of Aparecida, the Holy Father offers this passage as a contribution to the exploration of the theme of the *Meeting*. “The Christ-event is [...] the beginning of this new subject emerging in history. [...] ‘Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’ (*Deus caritas est*, 1) [...] The very nature of Christianity therefore consists of recognizing the presence of Jesus Christ and following Him. That was the marvelous experience of those first disciples, who upon encountering Jesus were fascinated and astonished at the exceptional quality of the one speaking to them, especially how He treated them, satisfying the hunger and thirst for life that was in their hearts. The evangelist John has portrayed for us the image of the impact produced by the person of Jesus on the first two disciples who met Him, John and Andrew. Everything starts with a question: ‘What are you looking for?’ (*Jn* 1:38). That question is followed by the invitation to live an experience: ‘Come and you will see’ (*Jn* 1:39). This account will remain in history as a unique synthesis of the Christian approach.” (*The Aparecida Document*, June 29, 2007).

It is the Holy Father’s hope that this year’s *Meeting* will be an opportunity for all participants to embrace or live more fully the Lord Jesus’ invitation to “come and see.” This is the power that frees women and men from the slavery of the “false infinities” that promise happiness without the ability to grant it. This is the power that makes them new protagonists in the world, called to make history the place where the children of God encounter their Father, as well as their sisters and brothers.

As he assures you of his prayer that you may live up to this exciting challenge, Pope Francis also asks you to pray for him and for the World Meeting of Families to take place in Dublin on August 25 and 26.

I add my own personal best wishes and prayers, and take the opportunity to express my own respectful greetings.

Cardinal PIETRO PAROLIN
Secretary of State