

**ADDRESS TO THE
“CENTESIMUS ANNUS” FOUNDATION**

5 June 2023

Dear friends of the Centesimus Annus Foundation,

1. First, let me thank you for your invitation to speak at this meeting, which for various reasons opens new prospects for the future of the Centesimus Annus Foundation. Above all, because of the theme you have chosen: *Memory to Build the Future: Thinking and Acting in Terms of Community*, taken from the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which proposed the notion of communion as the basis of human coexistence and a criterion for inspiring projects and activities.

The sense of being a community applies nicely to your meeting, which is meant to celebrate the constant attention of the Foundation to the See of Peter and its works of charity. The past three decades have been marked by dedication, clarity of goals and, above all, a sense of belonging. This meeting is the fruit of your profound conviction, as individuals and as a group, of being part of a body that acts and moves with its different members towards a single goal, which is concern for others. We are reminded of the image of the Church that Saint Paul describes in terms of the relationship between the members and the body: “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). The Apostle immediately passes from the relationship between unity and diversity to the charity that has always inspired Christians in their decisions and activities, grounded in the sense of being one with others. The many difficulties of the present time show us that this demands a radical decision, not simply a generic feeling.

Others, our neighbours, require solidarity, which is more than simple concern. To think and act in terms of community is itself an expression of solidarity, a word that “means much more than engaging in a few acts of sporadic generosity” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 116).

The goal of these days is to foster moments of reflection and formation, under the general rubric of being community, as brothers and sisters journeying, thinking and working together. This can appear to be a challenge in a world dominated by uncertainty, which seeks refuge by withdrawing into the sphere of the private and thus paying no attention to others. And yet today, more than ever, we must make an effort to read and respond to the signs of the times. We are called, in other words, to be a presence in service to others, embracing both the demands of the present and our hopes for the future.

Your exchange of ideas and experiences is certainly enriched by your differences, not only of geographical origin, but also of areas of competence and engagement in the financial, entrepreneurial and institutional spheres. This richness can be a sure source of hope, provided it remains solidly anchored in the vision of faith, which enables us to serve the common good with greater commitment, competence, transparency and professionalism. I am speaking of a form of service inspired by the Gospel that can adopt an approach attentive to the changing landscapes of our societies yet without fear of being a dissident voice. This is the summons issued to us by Pope Francis. “We should appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 168).

Simply reading the daily news invites us to consider how we can join together in advancing the common good, which, according to the Church’s social teaching, is the ultimate goal of all our activity. The encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which inspires the activity of your Foundation (cf.

Statues , art. 3) makes it clear that the common good “is not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather, it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person” (*Centesimus Annus*, 47). The constant appeal of the Magisterium to the value of the dignity of the person, is not only an encouragement for those who, at every level, seek to cooperate in pursuing the common good, but the basis of the obligation to transcend particular interests. For only by reinforcing the dignity of the person is it possible to meet crises and to strengthen social equilibria, economies, the structure of countries and the capacity of governments. Dignity, as we know, is no mere abstract term, but embraces the spiritual and material dimension of the human person, the realization of our aspirations, needs and, not least, our search for truth and justice.

By experiencing service as a dimension of our faith, we can cooperate in our various settings to overcome the many conflicts and concerns that emerge in the life of society, and offer a response to the issues that call for solutions. By their lives of service, Christians show that difficulties are also a means of discovering new ways of advancing the good of the community, glimpsing possibilities in even the smallest positive signs.

By now it is clear to everyone that the problems, the search for solutions, and the expectations of many of our brothers and sisters have a global dimension and call for equally global responses. This demands a complete conversion in the way we act. It requires, in other words, an effort to avoid policies or activities that promote “particular” solutions, since these can create exclusion or prove lost opportunities for everyone.

2 As we confront the great issues and threats that affect the real lives of peoples and countries, this commitment is not easy and can fail to produce the expected results unless we are convinced that it represents a

responsibility that we have towards others. In order to work together for the good of the community, generic calls for peace or economic growth or respect for the environment are not enough; we are called to concentrate on those situations that *Centesimus Annus* had indicated as strategic and that today the teaching of Pope Francis has further developed and brought up to date.

First, there is a need to elaborate more fully the basis and content of the notion of the common good. Here, the Magisterium provides two significant insights to guide our activity. The basis of the common good is the relationship between human beings which, as Saint John Paul II pointed out in *Centesimus Annus*, does not allow us to think of the person “more as a producer or consumer of goods”, but rather as a “subject who produces and consumes in order to live” (No. 39). Apart from relationships, we lose our essence and dignity as persons.

On this point, the teaching of Pope Francis provides two insights. First, *social friendship*, which “does not only call for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history, but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 233). Second, the *culture of encounter*, namely, the ability of different groups to come together and cooperate so that persons, in relationship, can “enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 220). These two principles point beyond themselves to goals such as integration and social cohesion, which are themselves ways of achieving the concrete common good. At the same time, they challenge us to think about the contribution that we can make to the future of many of our brothers and sisters, rather than looking for others to do what has to be done, or turning

our backs on the reality around us. Social friendship and the culture of encounter are the hallmarks of an open and future-oriented society.

The Church's social doctrine constantly emphasizes concern for the least, for those who are marginalized by the processes of development, learning and participation. The least are those who are not taken into consideration in the elaboration of policies and strategies that, albeit based on very detailed and technical analyses and on elaborate indices of efficiency, often fail to achieve the desired results.

In comparison, social friendship, which "excludes no one" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 94), makes it possible to develop projects and plan activities that are inclusive and not limited to one's own community or native country. In the end, faced with the situations and challenges of today's world, we are increasingly aware that "we are either all saved together or no one is saved" (*ibid.*, 137).

For its part, the culture of encounter is not only a way to build community or to engage in sporadic acts of charity that give the impression of eliminating exclusion, contempt or discrimination. It is a way of life that strives "to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which 'the whole is greater than the part'" (*ibid.*, 215). The image of the polyhedron, so dear to Pope Francis, helps us to understand why, in the make-up of our societies, those on the periphery fail to see their dignity and aspirations respected, or, if this happens, it is only after much time and effort, without attaining the hoped-for results. This is the source of division, conflict, mistrust and ultimately indifference. We forget that "each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable" (*ibid.*).

Friendship and encounter must never be confused with a tendency to reduce to a single standard individual actions, political activity or economic interventions. Nor are they a means for proposing courses of

action, or imposing an ideological vision of truth or distinguishing between right and wrong. For Christians, according to the missionary nature of their vocation and the truth they have come to know (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 46), this always involves respect for the freedom and dignity of the person. A freedom and dignity that require Christians, in their relationships with others, to “pay heed to every fragment of truth” that they encounter in the life experience and culture of others, and to be constantly prepared “to affirm in dialogue with them all that [their] faith and the correct use of reason have enabled them to understand” (ibid.).

3. Yet can we really speak of friendship and of encounter when we look at conflicts and clashes born of differing ways of seeing things? On a number of occasions, Pope Francis has stated clearly that “conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 226). As Christians, though, we are called “to be willing to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process” (ibid., 227). In this way, we will be able to work not only “for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history, but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 233).

In light of the events of 1989, *Centesimus Annus* spoke of the emergence of “new forms of democracy which offer hope for change in fragile political and social structures weighed down by a painful series of injustices and resentments, as well as by a heavily damaged economy and serious social conflicts” (*Centesimus Annus*, 22). At that historical moment, the Magisterium attributed great significance to values like democracy and freedom. In the words of the encyclical, “the Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of

replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate” (ibid., 46). Those words expressed the Church’s commitment to fostering change within societies and her desire to help build a society in accord with human dignity.

Faced with today’s realities, however, *Fratelli Tutti* raises a question and gives an answer that are noteworthy. “Nowadays, what do certain words like democracy, freedom, justice or unity really mean? They have been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action” (No. 14). Here we see a realistic approach, one that shows the importance of making credible the actions undertaken at every level, in contexts where opposition and conflict are constant elements, in relation to which values like freedom and justice are perceived as inadequate.

It cannot be denied that there has been a change in the meaning and effects attributed to the complex of values that govern our societies. Especially with regard to values, we have seen a weakening of the effective sharing that permits their application in social processes and in political and economic activities. Indeed, those activities, which naturally tend to change in different times and places, have always shared certain foundational values, the same values that in this phase seem to have disappeared.

For those called to take political and economic decisions or to plan goals and projected outcomes, the vacuum of shared values requires a careful discernment in order to safeguard general interests. Not to do so leads to approaches that are not inspired by subsidiarity, that is, by concern for those far away, as generally happens in those decisions defined as “global”. In such decisions, only an effective discernment can attend to the ethical principles that should accompany technical considerations, economic laws or political decisions. This calls for the practice of that

“good politics”, which seeks “ways of building communities at every level of social life, in order to recalibrate and reorient globalization and thus avoid its disruptive effects” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 182).

I trust that these few reflections will help to clarify how a common approach and a communal way of acting can enter into our engagement in social dynamics and institutions. These are areas requiring an awareness of our individual and collective responsibilities, as well as the consequences of our actions. Responsibility is an essential part of that relationship, and calls for reciprocal trust and commitment in preventing forms of conduct that can disturb peaceful coexistence.

The actions undertaken and the projects shared by the Foundation can be inclusive and produce their desired effects only if they are born of a “good politics”. So let us continue our efforts, conscious that true social friendship and the culture of encounter are not aspirations, but certitudes capable of guiding the actions of each and all towards the common good. Concern for others requires determining where to make resources converge in an organic and continuous way, in order to support the full realization of all human beings, their growth and their aspirations, based on their dignity and identity. To combine this commitment of yours with the concerns of the Church and the Pope will enable you to look to the future without being held back by fear of drawbacks. As *Centesimus Annus* observed, the Church will always face “new things” that often differ from her message and her mystery. Yet this must not make us fearful, for “she has felt and continues to feel obliged to denounce this fact with absolute clarity and frankness, although she knows that her call will not always win favour with everyone” (*Centesimus Annus*, 61). Thank you for your attention.