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“A new Pope, a new beginning”¹

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1. “*A new Pope, a new beginning*” is the title we have chosen for our meeting. In recent months we have witnessed two very important events for the Church, events that have brought something new that continues to amaze people.

We were all touched by Pope Benedict XVI’s last general audience. As he explained the reasons for his decision to resign from the petrine ministry, he was greeted with heartfelt applause: “I have asked God insistently in prayer to grant me his light and to help me make the right decision, not for my own good, but for the good of the Church. I have taken this step with full awareness of its gravity and even its novelty, but with profound interior serenity. Loving the Church means also having the courage to make difficult, painful decisions, always looking to the good of the Church and not of oneself”.² He went on to say: “I am not abandoning the cross, but remaining in a new way at the side of the crucified Lord. I no longer bear the power of office for the governance of the Church, but in the service of prayer I remain, so to speak, in the enclosure of Saint Peter”.³ We were all moved by those memorable words.

It would take a long time to draw up a comprehensive review of this pontificate, but we can say right away that this Pope has left us an impressive body of teachings of remarkable theological significance. They will serve to nourish the Church for many years to come. We were also inspired by the witness he gave of goodness, humility, thoughtfulness, simplicity, faith and great love for the Church. The Pontifical Council for the Laity and all of us here have countless reasons to be grateful to Pope Benedict XVI. He held the firm conviction that this is the time for the lay faithful to find new ways of associating together in the Church. One high point was the World Meeting of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities with the Successor of Peter in June 2006. The title of the meeting was “The Beauty of Being Christians”. I also recall the many documents and speeches he devoted to the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world. They are indeed a valuable legacy. We shall always remember the lecture given by the then-Cardinal Ratzinger at the opening of the first World

¹ Introductory address given by Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, at a meeting with ecclesial movements and new communities on the topic “A new pope, a new beginning” held in the PCL Aula Magna on 27 June 2013.

² †BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 27 February 2013.

³*Ibid.*

Congress of Movements and New Communities in 1998. He presented the theological setting for new groups in the Church. That lecture is still regarded as a milestone today.

2. On 13 March 2013 we witnessed the white smoke which surprisingly appeared after the fifth ballot. Then, after about an hour, we heard the announcement made by the cardinal proto-deacon: "*Habemus Papam*". The new Pope was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires in Argentina, who chose the name Francis after Francis of Assisi.

Each new pope who emerges from the Sistine Chapel Cenacle brings a new breath of the Holy Spirit with him. Every time, it seems that the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (*Is* 43:19). This time, there are quite a few new things! Pope Francis is offering the universal Church the rich and wonderful experience of the Church in Latin America. The Church there is deeply inserted in the culture of the people, and the faith there is simple and full of joy. It is a young Church filled with missionary enthusiasm that has so much to share with the universal Church. There are many movements and new communities in Latin America, and their experience tells them what it means to be Christians and to be Catholics on that continent. This is the Church which gave us the new pope, a sign of the maturity it has reached. It is also a clear sign of the catholicity of the Church. It is not closed within one continent or one cultural tradition. It always looks beyond.

We can see how Pope Francis is a very enthusiastic evangeliser. For many years he was on the front line in the challenging evangelising mission in the peripheral areas of Buenos Aires, especially in the existential peripheries of poverty and misery of every kind. This experience explains his frequent earnest calls to us to go out from ourselves and to go forward to meet others, especially the least fortunate: "Following and accompanying Christ, staying with him, demands 'coming out of ourselves', requires us to be outgoing; to come out of ourselves, out of a dreary way of living faith that has become a habit, out of the temptation to withdraw into our own plans which end by shutting out God's creative action".⁴

I believe that this call to go out from ourselves is an invitation that is particularly in keeping with what the movements and new communities are called to be. It is an ongoing challenge to go out from ourselves. We are always tempted to fall into a kind of spiritual narcissism which is to look at our reflection in the mirror and be satisfied. Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to avoid the dangerous risk of being self-referential and of closing in on ourselves. That would be a real betrayal of the true nature of the Church and its mission in the world. It would also be a betrayal of the very nature of the new charisms given by the Holy Spirit in our times. The Church, the movements and the new communities should

⁴ 1 POPE FRANCIS, General Audience, 27 March 2013.

constantly reach out to each other. We recall the first words spoken by Pope Francis in the Sistine Chapel the day after his election: “Journeying: our life is a journey, and when we stop moving, things go wrong”.⁵

Let us not forget that the Pope chose to be called Francis after Francis of Assisi. He is the first pope to choose that name. It is very significant that he chose the name of the “*poverello*” of Assisi. It sends a clear message to the world and the Church and, in a sense, it contains a programme for his pontificate. The Pope explained the reason for his choice several times soon after his election: “For me, [Francis of Assisi] is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation [...] How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!”⁶ Here we see his awareness and care for the sick, suffering, excluded and all who live “in the peripheries”, the people who find themselves on the margins of life. This brings to mind the ceremony of the washing of feet of twelve young people in the juvenile prison of Casal del Marmo in Rome.

Pope Francis brings a simple message to the whole Church of a God rich in mercy. It is a message of great hope: “How many deserts, even today, do human beings need to cross! Above all, the desert within, when we have no love for God or neighbour, when we fail to realize that we are guardians of all that the Creator has given us and continues to give us. God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. *Ez 37:1-14*) [...] Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too”.⁷

These are simple messages and simple words that bring to mind the motto of Blessed John Henry Newman: “Heart speaks to heart”. The Holy Father’s heart is speaking to the heart of the People of God, to God’s family the Church.

In today’s lost and confused world, Pope Francis continues to point to Christ as the only source of hope: “Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let hope be stolen! The hope that Jesus gives us. [...] Do not be men and women of sadness!”⁸ On another occasion he said: “Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation! [...] We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness!”⁹

It is a return to the simplicity of the gospel message. All of you who are working in the trenches of evangelisation can understand the importance of simplicity in conveying the gospel message so that “heart speaks to heart”. When we are talking about new evangelisation, we often pose the question of how we can

⁵ 1 POPE FRANCIS, Homily at Mass with the cardinal electors, 14 March 2013.

⁶ 1 POPE FRANCIS, Audience with media representatives, 16 March 2013.

⁷ 1 POPE FRANCIS, *Urbi et orbi* message, 31 March 2013.

⁸ 1 POPE FRANCIS, Homily on Palm Sunday, 24 March 2013.

⁹ 1 POPE FRANCIS, Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, 19 March 2013.

speak to people today about God. They are taken up with their everyday tasks and have no time for God. We might think that something special is needed, but in fact, we only need to have open hearts and be able to accept and welcome people.

Pope Francis has also brought a new breath of the Spirit to young people. He did so at the diocesan level of World Youth Day on Palm Sunday. He established real dialogue with them right away. He spoke to them as a friend and the youth responded enthusiastically. He said: “You bring us the joy of faith and you tell us that we must live the faith with a young heart, always: a young heart, even at the age of seventy or eighty. Dear young people! With Christ, the heart never grows old!”¹⁰ He went on to speak about the international youth meeting to be held in Rio de Janeiro the following July: “Dear friends, I too am setting out on a journey with you, starting today, in the footsteps of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI. [...] I will see you in that great city in Brazil! Prepare well – prepare spiritually above all!”¹¹

3. In this Year of Faith, we looked forward particularly to the day when the Holy Father would meet with the movements, new communities, associations and all lay groups in Saint Peter’s Square on the vigil of Pentecost. I would like to mention here some points that Pope Francis made in his homily at the Pentecost Mass. It really was a policy statement addressed to the new groups in the Church. It was well structured and revolved around three words: *newness*, *harmony* (meaning ‘communion’) and *mission*.

Newness. When we speak of ecclesial movements and new communities, we emphasise the newness that these kinds of organisations bring to the life of the Church. At the same time, it is important to ask ourselves how this newness, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is lived out within the movements themselves. The new charisms are fascinating in their newness, gifts from the Spirit that exceed human expectations. However, every new thing, even the most wonderful, can become routine with the passing of time. It can even become a burden and cause of weariness. What can we do to avoid losing our capacity to marvel at the beauty of the charism to which we belong? We are continuously called to check to see if we have been able to safeguard our wonder at its newness so that we do not fall into routine and habit. The Pope called our attention to this, and he asked us some very definite questions: “Are we open to ‘God’s surprises’? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit?”¹² To safeguard the ability to remain in awe of the beauty of the original charism is a great challenge for movements and new communities. Basically, it is to maintain our wonder with respect to the person of Jesus. We need only think

¹⁰ 1 POPE FRANCIS, Homily on Palm Sunday, 24 March 2013.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² 1 POPE FRANCIS, Homily at Mass with the ecclesial movements on Pentecost Sunday, 19 March 2013.

of the Franciscan charism and its spiritual energy. Many centuries have passed, but it still gives rise to enthusiasm and wonderment.

The second of the words Pope Francis emphasised is **harmony**. He was speaking about communion which is of course an important theological and ecclesiological concept from the Second Vatican Council, but the Pope used the term “harmony”. It is really the same thing, but the use of a different word should call our attention to communion. It is a further challenge for movements and new communities. The Pope declared: “Only the Spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity, while at the same time building unity”.¹³ He warned us of certain risks: “When we are the ones who want to build unity in accordance with our human plans, we end up creating uniformity, standardization”.¹⁴ I strongly encourage you to read the Holy Father’s words. They should be food for deep thought on the part of pastors as well. “When we are the ones who want to build unity in accordance with our human plans, we end up creating uniformity, standardization” – this is a warning addressed to all of us. It tells pastors, ecclesial movements and new communities to allow ourselves to be educated by the Holy Spirit always and constantly. Harmony is not something we make or decide on at a meeting. It is the work of the Holy Spirit whom we should allow to educate and purify us. The Holy Father tells us that this harmony is none other than a sense of Church. This is not about the kind of communion that makes life pleasant and being together congenial. It is a question of being or not being Church. Pope Francis stressed: “Journeying together in the Church, under the guidance of her pastors who possess a special charism and ministry, is a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit. Having a sense of the Church is something fundamental for every Christian, every community and every movement. It is the Church which brings Christ to me, and me to Christ; parallel journeys are very dangerous!”¹⁵

Finally, the third word: **mission**. This brings us back to the issue of going out from ourselves, another ongoing challenge for us all. We must not allow ourselves to get absorbed by our own plans and projects. We must remain open and available to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in every situation at any time. Maybe we have noted a tendency to close in on ourselves as a group, or maybe we have indeed allowed the Spirit to open us up to the mission.

4. A reading of the Holy Father’s homily at the Pentecost Mass should be followed by a reflection on the meditation that he gave at a morning Mass in *Domus Sanctae Marthae* on 16 April last. *L’Osservatore Romano* newspaper gives a synthesis every day of the Pope’s morning meditations, and it headed this homily with the title: “The Spirit is not subdued”. The Pope explained that the

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Holy Spirit moves us, makes us move forward, urges us towards permanent conversion, but this annoys us. We really do not want to change, or we want to reach a certain point and go no further. The Pope said clearly that this is being hard-headed. We want to subdue the Holy Spirit. This is to be foolish and slow of heart, a reference to the day's reading from the Acts of the Apostles which says: "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (*Acts 7:51*). "[The Holy Spirit] makes us travel, he pushes the Church forward. And we are like Peter at the Transfiguration: 'Oh, how wonderful it is for us to be here, all together!' as long as it does not inconvenience us. We would like the Holy Spirit to doze off. We want to subdue the Holy Spirit. And that just will not work".¹⁶ This warning also applies to movements and new communities. We all know that the new charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are a sign of hope for the Church and for the world. Nevertheless, we should not take it for granted that our relationship with the Spirit is the correct one, even though we think that we are on familiar terms with the Holy Spirit. Let us not be afraid to ask ourselves if this resistance to the Holy Spirit might have entered our organisation and our lives. Let us check to see if we are still receptive to the voice of the Spirit who speaks to our hearts and if we are responsive to the impulse of the Spirit.

5. When Blessed John Paul II addressed the crowd at the world meeting of ecclesial movements and new communities in Saint Peter's Square in 1998, he spoke about the ecclesial maturity of the movements, the challenges facing them and the way forward.¹⁷ Today, in the light of what we have just said, we would like to draw our attention to this concept and ask what we mean when we say "ecclesial maturity".

There are stages in the life of a movement or new community: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Maturity is the age that bears fruit. After twenty, thirty, forty years – and longer for some – abundant fruits are gathered and there is great rejoicing. However, that is not enough. We must look at these fruits and ask if they are really what the Lord wants of us. This is a fundamental question if we are to avoid the risk of feeling proud, of attributing the results to our own efforts and feeling that we are the only agents of our history. Both Pope Francis and Benedict XVI have insisted that statistics are not the law of the Gospel, God's law. When we observe the spiritual fruits of our ecclesial organisation, we should humbly say, as the Master taught us: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" (*Lk 17:10*). Let us not forget that the law of the primacy of grace is the law that rules any work of evangelisation. The Holy Spirit is the prime mover in the mission of the Church.¹⁸ There is ecclesial maturity when there is an attitude of deep gratitude and true humility for all that the Lord has

¹⁶ **1** POPE FRANCIS, Morning meditation in the chapel of *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 16 April 2013.

¹⁷ **1** Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Prayer Vigil for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* 30 May 1998).

¹⁸ **1** Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 21.

done in the lifetime of our organisation, and awareness that we are simply servants called to work in the vineyard.

What else do we mean when we say ecclesial maturity? It means to be able to identify and deal with specific problems. It means that we do not hide the problems or run away from challenges. In his homily at morning Mass on 13 April, the Holy Father commented on the reading from the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 6) that spoke of how the number of disciples was increasing. That was also the point at which problems began.¹⁹ We can compare the growth of the early Church with the impressive development of so many movements and new communities, and note that it is precisely during this period of expansion that problems arise. Pope Francis in his homily explained the reaction of the apostles to the problems in the Church at that time, and he concluded: “When there are difficulties, we must look closely at them, take them in hand and speak about them [...] We must never hide them. We should not be afraid of problems”.²⁰ He used descriptive language in giving the following warning: “It is not the right attitude to try to apply makeup to life and paint its face”.²¹ The courage to face problems and not fall into the temptation of applying make-up to life is one of the characteristics of maturity in movements and new communities.

Many problems present themselves during the time of maturity. We could mention, for example, spiritual weariness. The new organisations in the Church set high goals for their members that are quite demanding. It is the Gospel without discount. Cardinal Ratzinger said that it was faith, “eagerly embraced without any ifs and buts, without subterfuges and reservations, and experienced in its totality”.²² It is human, and at a certain point, a temptation to “slow down” can make an appearance, and we begin to see weariness and discouragement. This is where we address the problem of how to preserve the freshness and enthusiasm of the “first love”, that which first won our hearts, in spite of the passage of time. In the Book of Revelation we read what the Spirit said to the angel of the Church in Ephesus, and hence to the pastors of that Church: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (*Rev 2:4-5*). This is also addressed to all of us. No one can claim to be exempted from the risk of routine and that perilous *déjà vu* where everything seems to have become commonplace. The challenge is to become more mature “without aging”. When we make place for scepticism, distrust and sadness, then we become “old” and we no longer find the enthusiasm and joy of the Lord’s call to live according to that charism.

¹⁹ **1** Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Morning meditation in the chapel of *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 13 April 2013.

²⁰ **1** *Ibid.*

²¹ **1** *Ibid.*

²² **1** J. RATZINGER, *The Ecclesial Movements: A theological reflection on their place in the Church*, in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements. Roma, 27-29 May 1998*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1999, p. 24.

Pope Francis' address to the movements and new communities at Pentecost deserves thorough reflection. It strongly motivates us to grow towards the fullness of ecclesial maturity, and to do so in a way in which the joy of the first love continues to sustain our work of evangelisation and our missionary efforts.