

Cadine (Trent), February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Video message from Maria Voce  
To the Cardinals and Bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement,  
Attending the Conference “A charism at the service of the Church and of humanity”**

Your Eminences and Excellencies, Cardinals and Bishops,

It is a joy for me to greet you at the beginning of this conference organized in the context of the centenary celebrations of the birth of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement.

Your meeting is a particularly grace-filled occasion among the many events that will celebrate this anniversary. However, this year we do not want just to remember Chiara Lubich with nostalgia, but rather to *meet her today*. We have therefore chosen a motto: “Celebrate to meet”.

Yes, because we are convinced that Chiara, for whom the diocesan phase of the cause of her beatification and canonization has just ended, lives on. She is living in the spirit she gave us, in the Movement she left and in her countless followers scattered throughout the world. They continue to dedicate themselves every day for a more united and peaceful world. They do so in economic, political and cultural initiatives and in movements inspired by her spirituality, such as the Economy of Communion, the Movement for Politics and Policies for Unity and in hundreds of social, environmental and humanitarian projects that contribute to a more fraternal and just world.

The Focolare Movement was born from a charism and wants to be at the service of the Church and of humanity. The Pope often reminds us that ours is not simply an era of change, but a change of era. We know that there are challenges for the Church all over the world; yet what may seem like the decline of Christianity in so many of our lands can be transformed into a new Advent. We are called to a new inculturation of the Gospel of Jesus, which treasures the experience of the past but knows how to express it anew, prophetically, in our times. For this reason we must also open up and discover the power for renewal inherent in many of the new charisms present in the Church today.

A few months ago, during the annual Conference of the General Secretaries of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe, I had the opportunity to say that “Just as, after the Council of Trent, charisms made a decisive contribution to the reformation of the Church and a new missionary drive and effectiveness in society, today too – it seems to me – we should expect a decisive contribution from the charisms, also in these times that call on us to implement the Second Vatican Council ever more fully.”

Chiara shared with us her charism of unity, fraternity and fellowship, which she lived in the first place. She did so in her many journeys around the world in which she met people different in culture, religion, sex, ethnicity and age, without being stopped by any differences.

A central point of her charism is undoubtedly the presence of Jesus in the midst, as promised in the Gospel: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20). Our faith teaches us that the risen Jesus is always present, but his presence can be felt more or less strongly, and this depends on mutual love.

In a talk given to some bishop friends of the Movement in Rocca di Papa on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1984, Chiara explained:

*Persons who in other spiritualities seek God within themselves are like persons who in a garden filled with many flowers, look and admire just one flower: they admire, love and adore God present within themselves. It seems to us that God asks us to look at many flowers, because the Lord is present also in other persons, at least potentially so.*

*And just as I must love God present in me - when I am alone - so must I love Him in my brother or sister when he or she is beside me. Thus, I will not want to flee from the world, but to seek Christ in the world: I will not seek only solitude and silence, but also companionship and conversation.*

*And when love towards Christ in one's neighbour is reciprocal, in this encounter we live according to the model of the Trinity, where the two people are like the Father and the Son and among them springs forth the Holy Spirit, soul of the Mystical Body, with His gifts. ... When we meet in this way, the words of Christ come true: "Where two or three are united in my name, I am there in their midst." The Risen Lord is present. End quote.*

But in 2004 Chiara added:

*Living consciously with Jesus in the midst is a spirituality of the Church which makes us be Church. In fact, 'Jesus in the midst' is constitutive of the Church and does not represent only some aspect of Christian life such as poverty, prayer, study or love for the marginalized ... Living with Jesus in the midst means enlivening the Church herself in her identity and vocation<sup>1</sup>." End quote*

Throughout her life Chiara always promoted a spirituality of communion centred on this presence.

Among many others who welcomed Chiara's desire to promote the presence of Jesus in the midst of people, one was certainly Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, who died in 1993. He was a professor of philosophy and theology, a man of great learning and later became bishop of Aachen in Germany. Bishop Hemmerle knew how to live in dialogue with everyone and it was he, encouraged by Chiara Lubich, who brought ahead the lifestyle of fellowship and communion with Jesus in the midst among Catholic bishops from all over the world - and then also among bishops of various Churches. Such a lifestyle contributes to making collegiality ever more effective and affective. Hence the reality of the bishop friends of the Focolare Movement began.

I am glad that there is time in your programme to learn more about his ideas on this.

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<sup>1</sup>Chiara Lubich, "Jesus among us", Rolle (CH), 5 August 2004.

You will also have the opportunity to visit the city of Trent and the exhibition “Chiara Lubich - city world” which portrays significant moments in the life, thought and work of our founder. It is important, as the letter to the Hebrews says, “to recall those earlier days” (Heb 10:32-36), that is, those first days in which the Movement began in Trent and then spread all over the world.

You will then also go to Loppiano, where you will find a little town, a fruit of Chiara Lubich’s charism, with various concrete developments at the service of the Church and humanity.

When he visited the little town in May 2018, Pope Francis exclaimed: “In Loppiano everyone feels at home!” I hope you can really feel “at home” both while you are in Trent and then in Loppiano.

On that same occasion the Pope also told us: “You are at the start”. And we really feel this! We are at the start.

Chiara was farsighted: she spoke of a united world as if it were already a reality! Now it’s up to us, step by step, with humility but decisively, to achieve this ideal. I believe that her charism still has much to say to the world and the centenary can be the time when we rediscover it together.

I hope that these few days will bring you a profound encounter with Chiara, allowing you to discover the treasures of a charism given by the Holy Spirit for our times, and that they will be days of light, of fraternal communion and great joy!

Now your programme will continue with the new short video on Chiara, made recently with youthful energy. It is my gift to you.

With best wishes.