



## MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS

30 years of the International Forum of Catholic Action

(OUR TRANSLATION)

This celebration, which looks back at a founding moment, inevitably makes us look back in grateful contemplation. When we look back, we meet dreamers who dared to look forward with hope. That is why you are here today.

Looking back, we cannot forget a deep dreamer who started and encouraged the creation of this forum; and who today is enjoying seeing us celebrating these 30 years: Cardinal Eduardo Pironio; the one, who with a great love for Catholic Action and full confidence in its mission said: *“On the journey of Catholic Action there have been moments of darkness and light, moments of fatigue and loss of direction, fears of being overtaken by changing times and ecclesial standards. I believe that the Spirit has sent us this providential moment for the deepest renewal of our spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and missionary commitment. The celebration of this Forum will undoubtedly contribute to this renewal - and I shall return to this point later in my address. This Forum aims to involve other countries in the rich experience of association which has borne so much fruit and is so full of hope”*.

Pironio was a man of deep roots, of memory anchored in the dynamism of history as a Kairos, a strong time of salvation, a time of work, trial, purification and hope. He loved Catholic Action and believed in its lay missionary vocation. The Church can bear witness that Catholic Action opened new perspectives in the field of the responsibility of the laity in Evangelization. Many, evangelized and formed by Catholic Action, were living witnesses to truth, profoundness and to the Gospel in civil areas, very often hostile to faith. Catholic Action lay saints and blessed are a wealth for the Church. Those were "the saints next door" in so many communities.

However, history is not so clear-cut: along Catholic Action's way, as in that of the Church itself, there were, there are and there will be lights and shadows, moments of profound disorientation, of fatigue, of indifference, of fear of defeat by the demands of prevalent times. In times of crisis or difficulty, the great temptation is to shut yourself up, to look after the little you have, to wait in hiding, cherishing memories for the coming of better times. The parable of the talents is a true reflection of what happens when this situation is accepted and when we let it become a way of being, of being in the world living the reality of an unreality.

So as not to fall into this temptation, so as not to forget who we are and where we are going: it is important that we remember again and again - as the people of God did in the desert with the promise which the Lord himself had made them - where we come from, what our origin is and to know the heart of the mother who one day gave us birth.

And, Catholic Action has its origin in the very bosom of the Catholic Church. It has no founder nor any particular charisma. Its aim is that of the Church itself, evangelization. It does not assume any or other particular field of apostolate as its own, but rather assumes the aim of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel to all men and women and in all environments. Thus, its charism is not to have one of its own but to make itself available to the needs of the Church in the particular place. As a Church, we experience that with the power of the Spirit, we need to respond here and now to the cries of the world. In order to listen to them we have to go out, to be an out-going church, which, in a Samaritan way, approaches every man and every woman who suffers the pains of our times in their flesh or in their spirit.

We are still going through the first global pandemic in human history, which affected every country in our world without distinction. With the pandemic, the vulnerability of hundreds of millions of men and women on our planet, who have no possibility of having a chance to survive, has been revealed. Vulnerability put before us the risk of dying without any kind of foresight and regardless of where we live, of our moral condition, of our religious belief or of our socio-economic position. All humanity is affected equally. Vulnerability has managed to overcome all that which divided us and it has made us unequal. We discovered that we all have the same needs but different possibilities.

As I said at the beginning of the pandemic: “The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people’s souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly “save” us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity”. All of us, including myself, have experienced helplessness.

We come from a time strongly marked by globalization; economic, cultural etc. ... with its successes but also with the structures of sin which have emerged from it. Everything is global, even the virus made itself global.

As a forum you have a global mission and as you celebrate your first thirty years, you have a challenge and an invitation. I challenge you to discover more and more and in a stronger way where the life and history of our peoples are going, without prejudice, without fear, without distinctions and without being regulators of anyone's faith. It is an invitation to be there, where your interests, your concerns, your deepest wounds and your greatest anguishes are. We know that there is no greater poverty than not having God, that is, living without that faith which gives meaning to life, without hope which gives us strength to work, without feeling loved by someone who does not disappoint us. That is the situation and the place where Catholic Action has to carry out its mission.

Faced with the globalization of indifference, makes you feel that the task of building bridges and of creating communion is the deep call which God is making you. The Church is Communion for the mission. Communion is not an idea, it is a realization and the mission is not just another activity, it is the essence of ecclesial life. For Catholic Action, this

presupposes communion with the diocesan pastoral plan and with the pastors and a formation with a missionary bias. Catholic Action must not aim at forming future Christians but must and needs to accompany the process of faith in today's Christians in keeping with the characteristics of the stages of life they are passing through.

Communion is not something you acquire but the certainty of the presence of the Lord in the accomplishment of the mission. Evangelizing must be the passion of each baptized person, of each Catholic Action member, it means making a continuous effort to remain faithful to our identity. "Catholic Action has to rediscover the passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, the only possible salvation for a world that would otherwise fall into despair" (Paul VI). Catholic Action needs to create spaces where it can be present, give witness and where it can carry out missionary evangelization. In this way, it lives the mission of the Church, which is: to serve humanity within the Church of Christ, that is, in our Diocese and in our Parish, in perfect communion with the Universal Church.

I thank God for all the work you have done in these thirty years, which undoubtedly entailed a lot of effort. This applies above all to the early days when technology did not allow you to reach different parts of the world so easily and when everything needed strong determination. I thank you for all the initiatives of solidarity and accompaniment in the most peripheral dioceses, especially those of the third world, where I am aware that the presence of Catholic Action is strongly missionary and supports the work of the local churches.

Before finishing I want to ask three things from you:

- That the forum may very strongly feel the urgency of working for fraternity and social friendship, the only way to rebuild our wounded world.
- That the forum may instill, in the hearts of all authentic Christians, a spirituality based on a desire for holiness and on the understanding that holiness begins with the Beatitudes and materializes with Matthew 25; loving and working for our brethren who are suffering most.
- May the spirit, which animates all your projects and work, be that of being an outgoing Church, which lives the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing; and let this be known to all.

Thank you for all that which you are doing and for all that which you will be doing. Don't forget to pray for me.

May Jesus bless you and may the Blessed Virgin take care of you.

*(OUR TRANSLATION)*