

The third European Catholic Social Days continue CCEE's commitment to work for a stronger and integral European society. Since the celebration of these days in Madrid in September of 2014, they have become a priority event of CCEE and mark an increasingly fruitful cooperation with COMECE, who had organized the first European Catholic Social Days in Gdansk in 2009.

This year, the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe celebrated its 50th anniversary, which we commemorated at the Jubilee Assembly in Rome last September. The meeting was an opportunity to analyze the current situation in Europe and to identify the most significant elements influencing the ecclesial and civil fabric of our continent, while recalling its Christian roots. It was also an opportunity to renew our commitment to build a Europe founded on dialogue, fraternity and social friendship in the perspective of *Fratelli Tutti*, and following the exhortation of Pope Francis who, in Santiago de Compostela, invited us bishops to work "for a new European humanism, capable of dialogue, integration and generation" so that Europe can "grow as a family of peoples, a land of peace and hope" (Santiago Assembly Message).

Since its establishment CCEE has been a sign of the Church's sincere and attentive closeness to the beloved European continent as it faces the challenges of an ever-changing world. In these 50 years, "we have seen great changes in Europe: political, social, cultural, demographic, economic, as well as changes in the Church, but we have also noted the many challenges that the peoples of Europe face today" (Grušas, homily at the Closing Plenary Mass). Challenges of the times, such as the difficulty of dialogue, mistrust in encountering the other, the dominant materialistic culture, which press both Christian faith and religion, and human civilization in general.

To the European continent "sick with fatigue" (these are Pope Francis' words), we are called to announce Jesus Christ, the true hope of Europe since He is the truth, and only the truth sets us free. In the opening Mass of our Plenary Assembly, Pope Francis urged CCEE not to fall into discouragement and resignation as "we are called by the Lord to a splendid work, to work so that his house may be ever more welcoming, so that everyone may enter and dwell in it, so that the Church may have its doors open to all and no one may be tempted to concentrate only on watching." The three verbs: reflect, rebuild, and see, which he called to our attention as Christians and pastors, are the basis of our commitment for the future. We want to reflect today on "how many people no longer hunger and thirst for God! Not because they are bad, but because there is no one who can give them the appetite for faith and rekindle that thirst that is in the heart of man."

We want to work for the future: "rebuilding, Pope Francis reminded us, means becoming artisans of communion, weavers of unity at every level: not by strategy, but by Gospel."

We want to show Jesus. "So many in Europe think that faith is something already seen, that it belongs to the past. Because they have not seen Jesus at work in their

lives. This divine love, merciful and shocking, is the perennial novelty of the Gospel. It does not ask us to demonstrate, it asks us to show God, as the Saints did: not with words, but with life."

The Church's contribution to the reconstruction of Europe from a Christian perspective also comes through the Social Days. Starting from the current social issues that affect European societies, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and aware that the Gospel offers the criterion of true secularism that does not exclude loyal and respectful collaboration for the integral good of society, we want to analyze those issues that we believe are fundamental for a just social, economic and ecclesial recovery, working together with European peoples and governments, to a recovery that leaves no one behind.

The theme of the Days is subdivided into three thematic areas: demographic transition, technological and digital transition, and ecological transition, which will point to the fact that the first step for a just recovery is to invest in the family and in the defense of human life. This highlights the need to take care of the younger generations, who are the protagonists and not just spectators of this renewal; to take care of the most fragile social realities, of the poor and migrants, so that a dignified life may be offered to all; to take care of the environment that surrounds us, starting from a profound ecological conversion to which the Holy Father calls us in *Laudato si'* and making our own his "urgent invitation to renew the dialogue on the way in which we are building the future of the planet" (n. 14).

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the COMECE, Pope Francis invited Europe to rediscover itself, to be itself: "you, who have been over the centuries a forge of ideals and now seem to be losing your momentum, do not stop to look at your past as a scrapbook."... "Do not be afraid of your millennial history, which is a window on the future more than on the past." And he added: "Today, while many in Europe are questioning themselves with mistrust about its future, many are looking at it with hope, convinced that it still has something to offer the world and humanity".

This is our wish and our commitment for Europe.

[01757-EN.01] [Original text: English]