



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE 33rd MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES
(RIMINI, 19-25 AUGUST 2012)**

*To my Venerable Brother
Bishop FRANCESCO LAMBIASI
of Rimini*

I would like to address my cordial greeting to you, to the organizers and to all the participants in the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples that is now being held for the 33rd time. The theme chosen this year is particularly meaningful — “By nature, man is relation to the infinite” — in view of the now imminent Year of Faith which I have chosen to proclaim for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Speaking of man and of his desire for the infinite means first of all recognizing his constitutive relationship with the Creator. Man is a creature of God. Today this word — creature — seems almost to have gone out of fashion. People prefer to think of the human being as a being complete in himself and the absolute master of his own destiny. Viewing man as a creature seems “reductive”, because it involves an essential reference to something else or rather, Someone else — who cannot be managed by man — who comes into it to define his identity in an essential way; a relational identity, whose first given is his original and ontological dependence on the One who wanted and created us. Yet this dependence, from which modern and contemporary men and women seek to free themselves, not only does not conceal or diminish but rather reveals clearly the greatness and supreme dignity of the human being, called to life to enter into a relationship with Life itself, with God.

To say: “By nature, man is relation to the infinite” thus means saying that every person has been created so that he or she may enter into dialogue with God, with the Infinite. At the beginning of the world’s history Adam and Eve were the result of an act of love by God, made in his image and likeness, and their life and relationship with the Creator coincided: “God created man in his own

image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27).

Moreover original sin is ultimately rooted precisely in our first parents’ evasion from this constitutive relationship, in their desire to put themselves in God’s place, in their belief that they could do without him. Even after their sin, however, human beings are left with this all-consuming desire for this dialogue, almost as if the Creator himself had branded their soul and their flesh with it.

Psalm 63[62] helps us penetrate to the heart of this subject. “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is” (v. 2). Not only my soul but every fibre of my flesh is made to find its peace, its fulfilment, in God. And this aspiration in the human heart is indelible: even when God is rejected or denied, the thirst for the infinite that dwells in men and women is not slaked. Instead a frantic, sterile search for “false infinities” begins, that can satisfy them at least for a moment. The thirst of the soul and the longing of the flesh the Psalmist speaks of cannot be eliminated. Therefore human beings, unbeknownst to themselves, are reaching out for the Infinite but in mistaken directions: in drugs, in a disorderly form of sexuality, in totalizing technologies, in success at every cost and even in deceptive forms of piety. Even the good things which God has created, such as paths that lead to him, often risk being absolutized, and thereby becoming idols that replace the Creator.

Recognizing that we have been made for the infinite means taking the route of purification from what we have called “false infinities”, a way of conversion of heart and mind. We must uproot all the false promises of the infinite that seduce men and women and enslave people. Truly to rediscover ourselves and our identity, to live our dignity, we must return to recognizing that we are creatures, dependent on God. The possibility of a truly free and full life is linked to recognizing this dependence — which in our inmost depths is the joyous discovery of being God’s children. It is interesting to note that in his Letter to the Romans St Paul sees the contrary of slavery not so much as freedom as, rather, sonship, having received the Holy Spirit that makes us adoptive sons and enables us to cry to God “Abba! Father!” (8:15).

The Apostle to the Gentiles speaks of an “evil” slavery: the slavery of sin, of the law, of the passions of the flesh. Yet he does not counter this with autonomy but with “being slaves of Christ”, (cf. 6:16-22). On the contrary, he describes himself as “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ” (1:1). The fundamental point, therefore, is not to eliminate dependence which is a constitutive part of the human being, but to direct it to the One who alone can truly set us free. At this point, however, a question arises. Is it not perhaps structurally impossible for human beings to measure up to the loftiness of their nature? This question brings us directly to the heart of Christianity.

In fact, the Infinite One took a finite form in order to make himself a response that the human being could experience. The unbridgeable abyss between the finite and the infinite was filled from the Incarnation, from the moment in which the Word became flesh; the eternal and infinite God left his

heaven and entered into time, he immersed himself in human finiteness. Nothing, therefore, is trivial or insignificant in the journey of life and of the world. Men and women are made for an infinite God who became flesh, who took our humanity to uplift it to the heights of his divine being.

We thus discover the truest dimension of human existence to which the Servant of God Luigi Giussani ceaselessly called people: life as a vocation. Everything, every relationship, every joy, as well as every difficulty, finds its ultimate reason in being an opportunity for a relationship with the Infinite, God's voice that continually calls us and invites us to look up, to discover in adherence to him the complete fulfilment of our humanity.

"You have made us for yourself", St Augustine wrote, "and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions*, I, I, I). We must not be afraid of what God asks of us through life's circumstances, even if it be the dedication of the whole of ourselves in a particular form of following and imitating Christ in the priesthood or in the religious life. The Lord, in calling certain people to live totally in him, calls all to recognize the essence of their nature as human beings: made for the infinite. And God has our happiness at heart, our complete human fulfilment. Let us therefore ask him to allow us to enter and to remain in the gaze of faith that characterized the saints so as to discover the seeds of goodness that the Lord scatters along the path of our life and adhere joyfully to our vocation.

As I express the wish that these brief thoughts may be of some help to those who are taking part in the Meeting, I assure you of my closeness in prayer and my hope that the reflection of these days may introduce everyone into the certainty and joy of faith.

I very gladly impart to you, Venerable Brother, to those in charge and to the organizers of this event, as well as to everyone present, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 10 August 2012

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI