

Press Release – March 4, 2015

## **Pope Francis meets 60 Bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement Special thanks to bishops coming from “the blood soaked lands” of Syria, Iraq and Ukraine**

*«Friendship with this Movement and an interest in the spirituality of communion has reunited you in Rome... During these days, the theme for your reflection will be “the Eucharist, mystery of Communion”. In fact, the charism of unity, typical of the Work of Mary, is strongly anchored to the Eucharist, that gives it its Christian and ecclesial character. Without the Eucharist, unity would lose its magnet of divine attraction and it would be reduced to a feeling and to a dynamic that is solely human, psychological and sociological. Instead, the Eucharist ensures that Christ is at the centre, and that it is His Spirit, the Holy Spirit that guides our steps and our initiatives for encounter and communion».*

The Holy Father continued: *«The Bishop is the principle of unity in the Church, but this is not possible without the Eucharist: the Bishop does not gather the people around his person or his ideas, but around Christ».* He also said: *«The Bishop, conformed to Christ, becomes a living Gospel, the broken Bread for the lives of many, with his preaching and his witness.... He is urged by his love to give his life for his brethren, to go out to reach the ones who are marginalized and despised».*

The Pope thanked very specially the bishops who come from *« the bloodsoaked lands of Syria and Iraq and also of Ukraine».* *«In the suffering you are living with your people, you experience the strength that comes Jesus in the Eucharist, the strength to go ahead united in faith and hope. In the daily celebration of the Mass we are united with you and we pray for you, offering Christ’s sacrifice».*

*«Dear brothers»* he concluded *«I encourage you to continue with your commitment to promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. And I thank you for the contribution you give towards greater communion between the various religious movements».*

Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, the new Cardinal who is the Archbishop of Bangkok and the moderator of the Bishops’ meeting, addressed Pope Francis on behalf of the group. Among other things he said: *«We feel that in today’s world, we and our particular churches must be able to listen and to dialogue. It is not just by accident that God has put us in contact with people who suffer from the wounds of many evils. Even today, we bring before you the signs of so many tears, cries of despair and search signals which we carry in our hearts».*

He continued: *“When facing today’s enormous challenges, we feel small and at times helpless, but we confide in a greater love that called us and loved us so much that gave us the divine measure of love, which is ready to give one’s life for others, and, if necessary, to die for them. This is what our brother, Bishop-friend of Libya, Mons. Innocenzio Martinelli is doing; he is not here with us because he wants to remain there despite the real danger of death. This was the step taken by Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Syrian Orthodox and Metropolitan Boulos Yazigi, Greek Orthodox of the Patriarchate of Antioch, two Bishop-friends of Syria, seized about two years ago and almost forgotten by the public».*

Pope Francis greeted Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement, who was present with the Bishops at Paul VI Audience Hall. Having just returned from a meeting in Germany with 150 representatives of evangelical movements, she brought to the Pope their greetings and their hope in a common commitment towards unity. The Pope thanked her saying: *«Good! The ecumenical work you do is very important».*

**Pope Francis had before him a glimpse of the world** because these Bishops come from 35 countries; from Asia (Korea, Thailand, Myanmar, India), from the Middle East ( Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Algeria), from Africa (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Tanzania, South Africa), from the Americas (USA, Haiti, Panama, Ecuador, Brazil, Uruguay), from Europe (Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Rep., Rep. Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ukraine).

The president of the Focolare Movement, Maria Voce and the co-president Jesús Morán will also intervene during the Bishops' meeting that is currently taking place (3-6 March) at Castelgandolfo. They will also listen to experiences and projects about pastoral work that promotes more attention to the relationship between bishops and the faithful, commitment towards unity between various movements that exist both in the Catholic Church and in other Churches, and dialogue with other Christians and with different religions.

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