

Thirty-Three Theses on the Church in a Time of Epochal Change

Viri fratres,

Dear brothers,

I am grateful to God for the faith that has given you the courage to accept a special responsibility in and for the Church in these challenging times.

We are living not in an epoch of change, but in a change in epochs. This sentence of Pope Francis is often quoted as a bon mot. Let us take it as an impulse for serious reflection together.

In our time, the climate is changing in the natural environmental sense, but the moral and cultural environment is also changing. Social conditions and the social context of peoples' lives and minds are rapidly changing. The speed, extent, and depth of the current changes are causing a wholesale upsetting of certainties; following the long-standing disruption of traditional religious certainties, we now witness a shaking up of secular humanist certainties too, a shaking up of trust in institutions and the authority of experts.

As a result of globalization, there is a "blending of worlds", a mutual influence of civilizational paradigms. As a result of the current crisis of the globalization process, a new splitting and division are taking place - now not only between states, nations, religions, and religious institutions, but within them. Generational divides are widening, and in many places, there are tensions within families and even family breakdown.

Let us try to understand these changes critically and soberly, without panic, prejudice, ideological stereotypes, or nostalgia. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid! Do you not have faith?"

The first task of the Church is to proclaim these words and to bear witness to them by our resilience in the face of fear and despair.

The crises of our time, including the crises of the Church, are opportunities to fulfill the words of Jesus: Sell your possessions and follow me! This means: leave your securities and accept this poverty as a liberation, an opportunity for a new beginning.

1. To understand our situation today, I offer a method I call "*kairology*." It is a theological hermeneutic of processes in culture and society. These processes naturally involve moments of crisis. But crises can be seen through the eyes of faith as challenges and opportunities, as *kairos*, as part of God's teaching process, and as an impulse on the way to maturity. *Kairology* is the phenomenology and hermeneutics of God's presence in the world, especially in the events of history.

2. We believe in a God who manifests Himself in the dynamics of nature and history.

Human life and human history are a stream of events. Each event is made up of two elements: 1) something new that comes to people from outside; 2) how people understand and respond to what is new and unexpected; whether and how they are able to integrate the new into their lives.

God is present in the world and history in a unique way in people's faith, love, and hope. Faith, love, and hope are how people interpret and co-create the stream of life. Faith, love, and hope are places of the interpenetration (*perichoresis*) and interplay of God's grace with human freedom, creativity, and responsibility.

3. The *kairological* approach relies on critical analyses of the social sciences, but complements them with a contemplative dimension, a spiritual diagnosis of the times. This consists of a spiritual discernment between the "spirit of the times" and the "sign of the times."

The spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*) is the language of this world; *the signs of the times* is the language of God through the events of this world. Disciples of Jesus "who are in the world but not of the world"¹ face two dangers - on the one hand, uncritical conformity to the spirit of the age, and on the other hand, ignoring the signs of the times.

Conformity to the spirit of the age is manifested by dependence on "public opinion," ideologies, prejudices, and stereotypes.

There is no fixed boundary between the phenomena of everyday life and the "signs of the times"; sometimes, even in seemingly superficial or marginal phenomena in culture and society, we can discover "seeds of the Logos," fragments of God's self-transcendence. *Sensitivity to the signs of the times* presupposes critical and self-critical thinking and freedom from ideological manipulations. Still, its essence is a *contemplative approach*, patient and humble listening, and discernment.

4. Bishops have a special responsibility for fidelity to tradition. *Tradition is a living stream* of creative transmission (tradere) of the content of the faith.

Faithfulness to tradition presupposes the art of spiritual discernment between the core, in which the identity of Christianity lies, and the outer forms, which are always subject to changing cultural and historical contexts. Rigid adherence to the external form risks misunderstanding and distorting the inner meaning. Fidelity to tradition presupposes the art of *responsible reinterpretation and recontextualization*.

Distinguishing between content and form is an ongoing challenge; they cannot simply be separated. The question of the authenticity and identity of Christianity must be asked again and again. We are always in danger of "seeking the Living among the dead."

5. The core of the Christian message and the *pillar of Christian identity* is God's self-giving in the person, life, and teachings of Jesus Christ, especially the Easter story of death and resurrection. *The mystery of the cross and resurrection continues in the history of the Church*.

The crises of the Church are a participation in the suffering and death of Christ. In crises something always dies; crises often mean the task of walking through the dark night of abandonment.

Like individual conversions, the reforms of the Church and the revivals of Christianity are part of the "*ressurrectio continua*". Resurrection is not a cheap happy ending, a resuscitation of the past, a return, but a radical transformation, a surprise beyond our expectations and imaginations.

The resurrection involves a confrontation with the empty tomb and the task of recognizing the risen Jesus who comes in many different, often unexpected forms.

6. To understand our time in the light of the Easter event involves the courage to admit that many structures of previous certainties in society and in the Church are irretrievably shaken and dead. It is impossible to return to the lost paradise of "original naïveté".

The task of the coming "post-secular age" is to *find the "Galilee of today"* where we will see Christ - radically transformed and transfigured - again. Sometimes we will recognize him by voice, like Mary Magdalene; sometimes by wounds, like the Apostle Thomas; sometimes in the mysterious stranger, like on the road to Emmaus; and sometimes in the "least of the brethren", the poor and needy, in an anonymity that will last until the Last Judgment.

The Church is charged to seek the Risen One also beyond her institutional and mental boundaries, and thus to continually open and expand those boundaries. The process of growth and maturation of the Church cannot be evaluated only by the number of its formal members.

7. The process of *secularization*, which all the countries of our Western civilization have undergone or are undergoing in different ways and with varying intensities, does not mark the end but a profound *transformation* of Christianity, a transition to a new phase in the history of Christianity. It was another step on the path of the maturation of Christianity.

The dynamism of Christianity is based on the mystery of the Incarnation. The *incarnation* develops in history in a process of *inculturation*. *Evangelization*, the main task of the Church, would be mere and superficial indoctrination without inculturation.

There is not, and has never been, a naked, pure Christianity; Christianity always enters a cultural and religious context and lives and transforms ("dies and rises again") in the process of its enculturation. In history, the Church matures towards its eschatological form.

8. The historical development of the Church is not a unidirectional and one-dimensional progress, but a drama in which the animating Spirit of God overcomes the people's temptation to idolatry, to

fixation on a certain historical form of faith and Church, to confusion of the Church on the way with the *ecclesia triumphans* (the "heavenly Jerusalem"). The church on the road, the communion of pilgrims (*communio viatorum*) is the church militant (*ecclesia militans*), which is to fight above all against the temptation of *triumphalism*. The sin of *triumphalism* lies in the inability to distinguish between *ecclesia militans* and *ecclesia triumphans*. A church that does not hear the prophetic call to humility and is incapable of critical self-reflection makes Christianity a militant religion.

9. Throughout the history of Christianity, *the relationship between faith and religion has changed*. When asked whether Christianity was a religion, a school of philosophy, or an esoteric cult, the first generations of Christians answered in the negative. For them, the Christian faith was a journey, *a way* of following Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul took this path out of the narrow confines of a Jewish sects and presented it as a *universal offering*, transcending all cultural, religious, national, gender and social boundaries. It no longer matters whether one is Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave; in Christ we are all equal, we are all new creatures.

10. In ancient Rome, *Christianity became a religion* in the sense of the word *religio*. The word *religio* can be derived from the verb *re-ligere*, to reunite or bind together. Pre-modern religion (*religio*) was a *force integrating society*; it combined "civil or political religion" with philosophical religion and with piety (*pietas*). *Christianitas* - Christian civilization - was born. When I read the legend of Emperor Constantine's dream, I wonder what Christianity and Europe would have been like if the emperor had understood his dream in a deeper and more intelligent way, if he had understood the *signum crucis* not as an amulet for good luck in battle but as a *kenosis*, a way of self-giving love.

11. *Christianitas ended in the epoch of modernity*. Modernity brought about the emancipation and separation of the various sectors of life that "religio" held together. The "marriage" between Christian faith and religion in the sense of "religio", in the sense of the integrating force of the whole society, ended. The integrating role of society, the role of a common language, began to be played by other phenomena. In the Enlightenment, it was scientific rationality; in the Romantic period, culture and art; in the 19th century, nationalism; in the first half of the 20th century, "political religions" - communism, fascism and Nazism; from the second half of the 20th century, the media and the capitalist economy of the free market and globalization.

12. Christianity became "*one of the world views*" after the Enlightenment. Confessional divisions contributed to its loss of influence. Today, in a radically pluralistic postmodern age, the modern form of Christianity is in deep crisis.

During modernity, there has been a certain "*ex-culturation of Christianity*" in Western society; the Christian faith has gradually found itself in a situation of "cultural homelessness" and is looking for new forms of self-expression.

The Christian faith cannot breathe freely in the narrow form of a closed worldview or ideology. It needs to be freed from this form, just as St. Paul freed the faith from the narrow confines of one of a Jewish sects.

13. The failure to recognize in several major socio-cultural changes as *signs of the times* quickly enough has contributed significantly to the "exculturation" of Christianity in Western society. When the Church failed to recognize in time the consequences of the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, it *lost a large part of the working class*. When it reacted with panic and repression to changes in culture, science and philosophy, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it *lost a large part of the intelligentsia*. When the Church similarly reacted to the Cultural Revolution of 1968 (and especially the sexual revolution, the changes in the understanding of sexuality and sexual behavior of the young generation of the time), it *lost a large part of the youth*. Now it may lose a large proportion of *women* if it underestimates the current changes in women's self-understanding and their place in society and the Church.

14. The trauma of the revolutions of the 19th century and the nostalgia for the lost age of "Christianitas" in the Romantic era gave birth to an ideological "*Catholicism*" - a *counterculture*

against Protestantism, liberalism, and socialism. The Church of that time lacked the wisdom and courage to discern in the intellectual, social, and political currents of the time "the seeds of truth gone mad" (recall Chesterton and his definition of heresy).

The *ideologization, clericalization, and intellectual self-castration* of a particular form of the Catholic Church, particularly between 1848 and 1958, contributed to Christianity's ex-culturation and the secularization process. Christianity began to lose its generative power.

15. *The Second Vatican Council* marked an essential step on the journey of the Church from one form to another, *from Catholicism to catholicity*. It was to replace "ideological Catholicism," the static model of the Church as a solid castle of certainties, the last bastion of the former Christianitas, besieged by enemies in an apocalyptic cultural war of good and evil, with a more realistic and humble understanding of the Church as a living organism, evolving and maturing towards "catholicity," universal openness.

But "catholicity" - like the other characteristics of the Church, her unity and holiness - will only be fulfilled in the eschatological goal of history, when God is "all in all." The eschatological hope, however, is to encourage the development and maturation of the Church in history. The dynamic understanding of the Church was approached by the Second Vatican Council with the image of the Church as the people of God, wandering through history.

At the Council, the Catholic Church offered a dialogue in partnership with other Christian churches, other religions, and the modern secular world. However, the offer of reconciliation with modern culture *came too late* - when the modern era was already coming to an end.

The Cultural Revolution of 1968 was probably both the climax and the end of the modern age. The following year, 1969, the year of man's stepping on the moon and the invention of the microprocessor, can be seen as the symbolic beginning of the *postmodern age*, the age of radical globalization, the 'internet age'. The process of globalization has changed the nature of the economy, politics, culture, people's mentality, and the socio-cultural conditions of religious life.

The first sentence of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* sounds like a marriage vow of love, respect, and fidelity of the Church to modern man. However, at the time of the "Second Enlightenment," the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, the Church seemed to modern man to be too old and not very attractive.

17. The process of the "ex-culturation of Christianity", which became dramatic in our Western civilization in the 19th century, continued even beyond the Second Vatican Council. The *culture wars between the two extreme wings* of the Church have weakened the vitality and credibility of the Church for decades. One of the reasons for this was that the call to "aggiornamento" was falsely and superficially understood by many as an impulse for cheap conformity to the dominant mentality. The reaction was a similarly unfortunate traditionalism.

Sociological research over the last decade shows that most of the youngest generation of Catholics are no longer interested in culture wars, such as the disputes between the pro-life and pro-choice groups. Today's young Catholics do not react polemically to the Church's traditional teachings on morality (especially sexual morality) as has been the case in the post-Conciliar era and as survives among older generations of Catholics. Research shows that this is because the vast majority of today's young Catholics do not know or care about these teachings; their experience of faith and moral decision-making is increasingly individual. They seek space in the Church for spiritual experience, not directives for their private lives. Their approach to the tradition and institution of the Church is not hostile and polemical, but selective.

18. Alongside this widely prevailing mentality, there are small but very vocal *conservative groups* among the young; and these are where today many priestly and religious vocations are recruited. It cannot be overlooked, however, that their "*traditionalism*" *often compensates for their insecurities and psychological problems*.

Some converts, whose families have not helped them find a personal identity, yearn for a *strong group identity*. The tendency toward fundamentalism, intolerance, and a sectarian mentality are similar among religious and political extremists; sometimes, religious and political extremism are combined.

19. The Second Vatican Council offered sought to respond to the late modern era; however, the postmodern and post-secular era brings new challenges and tasks.

The present effort of *synodal renewal* of the Church responds to these challenges.

The *journey of synodality* is an anamnesis, a recalling and reviving of the original form of Christianity as a journey, a form that has been greatly obscured by premodern and modern forms of Christianity - Christianity as Christian empire (Christianitas) and Christianity as a worldview.

Synodal reform is meant to free the Church from closed-mindedness and collective narcissism so as to listen attentively to "what the Spirit is saying to the churches." This ongoing process of reform (the living Church is *ecclesia semper reformanda*) involves a deepening of the spiritual life (communication with God), communication between the various groups in the Church, and broadly ecumenical communication with other Christians, with other religions and their adherents, and with unbelievers.

20. Christianity today cannot play the role of religion in the political sense of the word *religio* - integrating the forces of the whole society. But the word "religio" can also be derived from the verb *re-legere*, to read again. Christian faith and Christian theology today can play the *critical role of a new hermeneutic*, a new and deeper reading and understanding of both its sources (Scripture and tradition) and the "signs of the times."

A new hermeneutic, a "re-lecture" or rereading of the Gospel message in the light of the historical experience of the Church and a contemplative reflection on that experience, is a necessary precondition for the revitalization of the faith and the renewal of the Church.

Pope Francis's writings, especially *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia* and the encyclicals *Laudato si*, and *Fratelli tutti*, are examples of this new hermeneutic, a creative interpretation of tradition and of the "signs of the times" - they contain impulses and tasks for the theology and spirituality of the synodal journey.

21. Secularization did not mean the disappearance of religion or the disappearance of Christianity, but the *transformation* of religion and the transformation of the shapes of Christianity. While "organized religion," the traditional institutional form of Christianity, is undergoing a crisis, two phenomena are growing: *the interest in spirituality and the attempts to turn religion into a political ideology*.

Both of these phenomena are "signs of the times" - a call to cultivate both the depth dimension of faith and its social dimension, the political responsibility of Christians. However, there are significant dangers associated with both - especially when the spiritual and political dimensions are divorced. Then spirituality turns into kitsch esotericism and the public form of Christianity into an ideological "Catholicism without Christianity."

22. The relationship between religion and politics has changed; it can no longer be understood as a relationship between Church and state. Churches have lost their monopoly on religion and spirituality, and nation-states have lost their monopoly on political life.

Not only in the world of Islam but also in the world of Christianity - for example, in the post-communist countries - we see political attempts to exploit religious symbols, rhetoric, and emotionality. Religions become an instrument for defending group (often national) identity and power-political interests.

The attempt by the war criminal Vladimir Putin to subvert the international legal order and restore a totalitarian empire is accompanied by an effort to link nationalism with Orthodoxy. Similarly, some nationalist forces in Europe and the U.S. are attempting to continue the unfortunate tradition of Catholic integrationists' affinity with authoritarian regimes in the 1930s and 1940s (what I call "Catholicism without Christianity"). Throughout history the Church has always paid heavily for such connections.

23. An analogous dangerous temptation was the attempt to interpret the mission of the Church in the spirit of Marxist secular eschatology. The struggle for social justice and solidarity with the poor and exploited is undoubtedly the authentic face of Christian love. But love, reconciliation, and mercy must not adopt a chiliastic and messianic conception of revolution. Violent revolutions have not brought the promised heaven on earth, but have often turned the earth into hell.

Revolutionaries and inquisitors who play the angels of the Last Judgment and want to quickly and violently separate the wheat from the chaff need to be reminded of Jesus' urgent call for "*eschatological patience*." Jesus counsels the apostles to let the various plants grow together in the field of this world because excessive efforts to keep God's area clean and orderly can damage the harvest.

24. The most crucial process affecting the political, economic, cultural, and religious development of our world has long been the process of *globalization*. Technological progress has enabled a global free market in goods and ideas. This has had its political consequences: some closed systems, such as the empire of Soviet power, based on a state-planned economy and the censorship of ideas, have been swept away in the fierce winds of competition. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet communist empire and the bipolar international order, some succumbed to the illusion that the "end of history" and the global victory of liberal capitalism and Western-style democracy was at hand. For a time, political evolution seemed to follow the logic of Darwin's theory: flexible systems triumph over those unable to adapt to changing conditions. In this respect, the dynamic society of the West, which was the cradle of the process of globalization, seemed unrivaled.

25. However, the twenty-first century has become a time of *profound crisis in the globalization process*.

The idea that the world would evolve according to a single global scenario proved to be an illusion. A series of crises have shattered this illusion: the attack by radical Islamists on Manhattan, a symbol of American capitalism, in 2001; the economic crisis in 2008; the refugee crisis in 2015; the administration of the populist Donald Trump, and the attack by his supporters on the Capitol, the symbol of American democracy, in 2019; the mismanaged coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021; and, finally, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, with its genocidal features, which, after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust, few could even imagine.

Pope Francis rightly speaks of a *piecemeal Third World War*.

26. *Russia's aggression against Ukraine* is not just a local conflict somewhere on the periphery of our world but will have global economic, political, social, and moral consequences. If the West does not show sufficient solidarity with Ukraine and cannot help it to stop Russian aggression. In that case, it will mean a total collapse of confidence in the democratic world and an emboldening of all dictators and aggressors worldwide.

The decisive front in this is public opinion in Russia, which is deprived of freedom of information, exposed to intense brainwashing by lying propaganda, and fed on nostalgia for the Soviet empire. Russia's military incursion is an expression of the fear that the 'color revolutions' in the post-communist states could awaken civil society in Russia too and shake the rule of a narrow elite of oligarchs. We do not yet know what impact international isolation, poverty, and humiliation will have on Russian society. We do not know whether it will encourage a weak democratic opposition or, on the contrary, awaken a fanatical nationalist-fascist movement, as happened in Germany after the First World War. All that is certain is that, even after the end of the hot war in Ukraine, the world will not return to the way it was at the beginning of this year.

27. All the severe *diseases of our time*, not only infectious ones such as the coronavirus, but also social diseases such as terrorism and organized crime, are spreading rapidly in the global area. The process of globalization has not created a 'global village' but rather confronts us with the radical plurality of our world. The growing sense of disorientation and anxiety about the diversity and fluidity of our world is creating a desire for simple answers to complex questions. Populism, nationalism, political extremism, and religious fundamentalism are spreading.

The Church is to be a *field hospital* in this world, Pope Francis teaches. However, a field hospital presupposes the existence of a home-base hospital dedicated to diagnosis, prevention, therapy, and rehabilitation. The Church's duty includes research and diagnosis of present conditions (reading and interpreting the "signs of the times") and creating systems of immunity against sick ideologies, fake-news propaganda, and the infections of destructive emotions.

28. The development of the Church takes place *differently in different cultural contexts*. In particular, the Synod of Bishops on the Family has shown that the same pastoral approaches cannot be applied in the environment of a post-industrial, post-modern society and in the environment of a tribal

community in which alternative lifestyles and value orientations are only beginning to penetrate. This experience has encouraged a tendency towards synodality, towards the *decentralization of the governance* of the Church, which implies the delegation of enormous responsibility to the individual episcopal conferences and the competence of the bishops to read the signs of the times and to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential. It also presupposes the courage of the bishops to apply the principle of synodality even within individual dioceses and parishes and the art of listening and joint decision-making at all levels.

29. Synodality presupposes recognition that the unity and equality of all those who have responsibility for the Church by virtue of their baptism precedes the diversity of charisms and ministries associated with specific tasks and responsibilities.

The architecture of the Church is constituted by the dynamic union and compatibility of *hierarchical, democratic, and charismatic elements*, none of which must be absent and none of which must displace the others. The fact that the hierarchical structure has long been infected by the disease of clericalism, which has shown its tragic features most markedly in sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse, does not mean that this structure should be undervalued, neglected, or even discarded. Without a doubt, the dignity of the whole people of God demands that it be corrected by a democratic element. However, just as with a democratic culture in the political life of civil society, it is always necessary to guard against becoming a dictatorship of the majority or of aggressive pressure groups. Consequently, more care must be taken to ensure the moral quality of mutual communication in the Church. The assembly of God's people (ecclesia) is not to be a copy of parliament as a site of partisan struggles and competing power interests. The role of the prophet is, among other things, to remind us that the "vox populi" is not always and automatically the "vox Dei".

30. *The ecumenical character of the synodal process guarantees its catholicity.* Ecumenical openness cannot remain only within the limits of the relations between Christian Churches ("*first ecumenism*") and interreligious dialogue ("*second ecumenism*"). A "*third ecumenism*" is also a sign of the times: *the change in the relationship between "believers" and "non-believers."* The concept of "faith" and the relationship between faith and unbelief is much more complicated than it seemed in the past.

Individual people's belief and unbelief lie not only at the level of their consciousness, opinions, beliefs, and statements, but occupy a much more profound dimension too. In the New Testament (in the Epistle of James), we read that the faith implicit in a person's practice and existential attitudes is more authentic and relevant than spoken words and opinions.

When we think about faith today, we must also take into account its *deeper dimension* - that mystery of the presence of God in the heart of every person, of which Pope Francis speaks with such urgency. We must not reduce faith to belief, to a worldview or even ideology.

31. When many studies today, employing old sociological categories, note the decline of the faithful in much of our world, they are thinking primarily of those "dwellers" who fully identify with the current institutional and mental structures of the Church. The number of these people is declining, but this does not mean an automatic increase in the number of convinced atheists. Traditional religiosity and dogmatic atheism consist in a "dwelling", a stasis; faith in the biblical sense is rather a journey, a quest.

Today, the number of "*nones*" – the people which answer "none" when asked what their religious affiliation is - *is growing rapidly.*

The "nones" used to be considered the fourth most significant segment of the population today, after those who subscribe to Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Atheists are not the dominant segment of this group. Among the "nones" we can find agnostics, apatheists, "spiritual seekers," people who describe themselves as "spiritual but non-religious," Christians, disillusioned by churches, esoterics, neo-agnostics, sympathizers of alternative religious streams, etc.

32. The future of the Church depends largely on its *ability to communicate with this group of "nones", especially with "spiritual seekers"*. The formation of candidates for priestly and other pastoral ministries in the Church still focuses primarily on care for "parishioners" (traditional believers) or on

the mission to expand the number of believers. Communicating with nones, however, requires an entirely different approach.

The avant-garde in this field is the so-called "*categorial pastoral*" - the ministry of chaplains in hospitals, the army, or prisons. They are "for all" in these institutions. Their ministry is "*spiritual accompaniment*." It is based on the conviction that everyone's life has a "spiritual dimension," a search for meaning.

The search for the meaning of one's life or particular life situation is particularly relevant in so-called "liminal situations." But are we not all living today in a "liminal situation," a situation of profound change?

33. Accompanying the seeker is not possible from the position of "owners of the truth". Truth is a book that none of us has yet finished reading. Pope Francis says:

"God is everywhere, and we must know how to find Him in all things [...]. Yes, there is still an area of uncertainty in this quest to seek and find God in all things. There must be. If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answers to all the questions—that is proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not our certainties; we must be humble. [...]

The proper attitude is Augustinian: to seek God to find Him and to find Him to keep seeking Him. The search is often groping, as we read in the Bible. This is the experience of the great fathers of the faith who are our models.

Abraham leaves his home without knowing where he was going, by faith. [...] Our life is not given to us like an opera libretto, in which all is written down, but it means going, walking, doing, searching, seeing... We must enter the adventure of the quest to meet God; we must let God search and encounter us. [...] I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. /.../ We can and must seek him in every human life. Even if a person's life is a field full of thistles and weeds, there is always room for good seeds to germinate. We must trust God."ⁱⁱⁱ

So speaks Pope Francis, the great prophet of our time. At the beginning of our meeting today, I thanked you for the trust, courage, and obedience with which you have accepted not only the demanding ministry in the Church, to the Church, and to the world of our time. I conclude by wishing that God may continue to deepen and refresh your trust and hope.