



III EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS BRATISLAVA, 17-20 March 2022

To dear brother
Msgr. **Gintaras GRUŠAS**
Archbishop of Vilnius and CCEE President

I seize the current opportunity of the third iteration of the European Catholic Social Days in Bratislava from 17 to 20 March organised by the CCEE together with the COMECE and the Slovakian Bishops' Conference, I would like to address my cordial greetings to you, dear Brother, and to all the participants.

What we are experiencing in these last few weeks is not what we had hoped for after the difficult health emergency caused by the pandemic, which made us experience a sign of helplessness and fear, together with the fragile condition of our existence. The tragedy of the war taking place in the heart of Europe shocks us; we never thought we would see such scenes again, reminiscent of the great wars of the last century. The distressing cry for help of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters urges us as a community of believers not only to reflect seriously, but to weep with them and to do something for them; to share the anguish of a people whose identity, history and tradition have been wounded. The blood and tears of children, the suffering of women and men who are defending their land or fleeing from bombs challenges our conscience. Once again humanity is threatened by a perverse abuse of power and vested interest, which condemns defenceless people to suffer all forms of brutal violence.

I thank you all, dear Brothers in the episcopate, for your prompt and coordinated response in coming to the aid of the people, guaranteeing them material help, shelter and hospitality. Let us not grow weary in this endeavour and let us not cease to call upon God and man for peace. I therefore exhort you to continue to pray that those who hold the fate of nations will leave no stone unturned to stop the war and open a constructive dialogue to end the immense humanitarian tragedy that it is causing.

Today, more than ever, there is an urgent need to review the style and effectiveness of the *ars politica*. In the face of the many changes we are witnessing at international level, we must ensure “the development of a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations”. (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, no. 154). We pray that war, which “leaves our world worse off” and it is “a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil.” (no. 261), may provoke an opposite reaction, a commitment to rebuild an architecture of peace at the global level (cf. no. 231), where the European home, born to guarantee peace after the world wars, plays a primary role.

The title you have chosen for these days, *Europe beyond the pandemic: a new beginning*, invites reflection on the transition taking place in European society. This time, still impacted by the pandemic, has brought about significant social, economic, cultural and even ecclesial changes. In this situation marked by suffering, fears have grown, poverty has increased and loneliness has

multiplied; while many have lost their jobs and are living precariously, the way of relating to each other has changed for everyone. In this context, the life of the Church has also not been spared from many difficulties, especially due to the limitation of pastoral activity.

We cannot stand idly by; as Christians and as European citizens, we are called upon to courageously implement what one of the great founding fathers of the European Community, Alcide De Gasperi, said when he spoke of the common good of our European homelands, of our fatherland Europe (Speech to the European Parliamentary Conference, 21 April 1954). Yes, Europe and its constituent nations are not opposed to each other, and building the future does not mean unifying, but uniting even more in respect of diversity. For Christians, rebuilding our common home means “to become artisans of communion, weavers of unity at all levels. Not as a strategy, but because of the Gospel” (Homily during the Mass with the CCEE, 23 September 2021). In other words, we need to start from the very heart of the Gospel: Jesus Christ and his saving love. This is the ever-new proclamation to be brought to the world, first and foremost through the witness of lives that show the beauty of the encounter with God and love for one’s neighbour.

The image you have chosen as the logo for these Days expresses this well: that of St Martin of Tours cutting his cloak in two to give it to a poor man. It reminds us that love is concrete proximity, sharing, and care for others. Those who love overcome fear and mistrust towards those who come to our borders in search of a better life: if welcoming, protecting, accompanying and integrating so many brothers and sisters fleeing from conflict, famine and poverty is right and human, it is even more so a Christian stance. The walls still present in Europe should be transformed into gateways to its heritage of history, faith, art and culture; dialogue and social friendship should be promoted, so that human coexistence based on fraternity may grow.

I entrust your work, dear Brother, to the maternal intercession of the Mother of the Church and Queen of Peace, and to the protection of the Saints and Patrons of Europe. I bless you all from my heart and ask you, please, to continue to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 15 March 2022

Francis