



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

**H.E. Msgr Stanislav Zvolenský
Archbishop of Bratislava, President of the Slovak Bishops' Conference**

Eminences, Excellencies, Madam President, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to welcome you on behalf of the Slovak Bishops' Conference to the event which we are organising jointly with the CCEE (Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe) and COMECE (Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Union), and which is called the 3rd European Catholic Social Days. We are gathering in the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava, to talk about a new beginning - Europe beyond the pandemic. In these days we want to reflect on how Christians can effectively contribute to solidarity and social justice in European society. At the same time, this meeting of ours is unintentionally marked by the events we are following in Ukraine. The theme of the war confrontation and its consequences, especially from a social point of view, from the point of view of welcoming and helping those who are suffering, from the point of view of concrete Christian solidarity, has become particularly topical in this regard. Yesterday we opened our event spiritually, with a service in St. Martin's Cathedral: it included a prayer procession with candles, to express our prayers to Almighty God for justice and peace, for peace in Ukraine, for peace in the whole world. We want to continue in this spirit of prayer and supplication for God's mercy throughout our European meeting here in Bratislava. At the same time, in this space of ours, we want to reflect on the new initiatives that will be needed to bring the message of the Gospel into the life of Christian communities in a concrete way. So, a very warm welcome to all of you, to all the distinguished guests, to the delegates of the bishops' conferences, to the expert speakers from both the Church and civil society, to the participants here in the hall, and to those of you who are connected to us through the webcast. We have an intense few days ahead of us, which will surely provide valuable impulses for our European community. Given that we are holding this event in Bratislava, we have chosen a logo for it that expresses the connection of the local ecclesial community with St Martin: he is the patron saint of the Archdiocese of Bratislava. Perhaps the most frequently depicted scene from his life still shows him as a soldier sharing his cloak with a poor, smitten man. He is not indifferent to poverty, he perceives it and does not hesitate to show love in a concrete way. He has nothing extra, but he also shares what he has in order to alleviate suffering. He does not cling to his comfort when he sees a brother in Christ who is in need. Later, in a dream, he recognizes that the one to whom he showed mercy was Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God, who became man to redeem us. This image is very relevant to our situation. We are facing challenges that will require us to act in a concrete way, to share, not to want to protect our comfort at all costs when we see the suffering of others. At the same time, as believing Christians, we must not, in our efforts to help in concrete ways, forget the spiritual realm, the service of God, which gives ultimate purpose and meaning to our efforts. We face challenges that require both. In the spirit of the encouragement of the Holy Father Francis, we do not want to succumb to a culture of disinterest, but to build a culture that serves life, that is inspired by the Gospel, that takes notice of the poorest, that does not discard anyone, that leaves no one behind. I trust that the coming days will offer us a good opportunity to move forward on this path, on which may our Lord guide and accompany us. Thank you very much!