

MED 2026 Barcellona
Alza la mirada
9-12 June
Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

I am pleased to convey fraternal greetings on behalf of the Holy Father, who has just arrived in your beautiful city of Barcelona. Besides being the capital of Catalonia Barcelona is known as a global city, a crossroads of cultures and hopes at the heart of the Mediterranean that Pope Francis often described as a “laboratory of fraternity.”

I thank the authorities of Catalonia for welcoming us today. For several years now, your commitment to the Mediterranean process has sought to build paths of dialogue and cooperation among the five shores of our shared sea. Your city hosts the intergovernmental Union for the Mediterranean, bringing together forty-two countries from Europe and the Mediterranean basin. Founded on 13 July 2008, during the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, this organization is intended to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euromed) established in 1995 under the name of the Barcelona Process.

Last year, on 1 March 2025, the *Bel Espoir*, a peace training ship, set sail from Barcelona on a remarkable odyssey to forge bonds of friendship among young people of various faiths from all the countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Pope Leo’s visit to the ship in Ostia later in the year demonstrated his interest in initiatives that teach young people to build peace. He gave them this message: “It is essential to learn to communicate, to sit down, to learn, to listen, to express one’s own ideas and values, and to respect one another so that others feel truly heard. The experience of dialogue that you are promoting in the various countries of the Mediterranean basin is indeed a sign of hope for the whole world and for all of us, and for yourselves as well, because you are learning to live an important aspect of human life. This helps us all to learn to respect one another.”¹ This is precisely what we will experience over the next four days of meetings.

How wonderful that Pope Leo will bless the largest tower of the Sagrada Familia, a symbol of a peace we long for – a disarmed peace, a disarming peace. Let us lift our eyes, *alza la mirada*, to gaze together upon a horizon of peace and reconciliation. Let paths open

¹ Leo XIV, Message on the *Bel Espoir*, 17 October 2025.

up in our hearts – paths of care and integration that we must continually renew to restore hope to this region of the world. The Mediterranean, cradle of civilizations, is unfortunately marked by conflicts of unprecedented severity. Geopolitical divisions, economic inequalities, forced population displacements, and tragedies of migration highlight the urgent challenges we face. We owe special care for the most vulnerable, victims of these divisions and inequalities and of the impacts of climate change. New forms of exclusion particularly affect young people whose desires for education and a promising future are frustrated by increasingly complex barriers to mobility.

In this context, the Mediterranean Coordination Process – initiated by Pope Francis, overseen by Cardinal Aveline, and led by a group of stakeholders present here today – proves particularly relevant. It is not merely a matter of analysing or measuring. It requires a new paradigm of social friendship. A concrete process in the very spirit of the synodal approach, proposed to the universal Church, must begin here: beginning from local realities, learning to listen to one another, to discern the real challenges, to walk together, to build a mediterranean future together.

This method pervades the Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, where Pope Francis recalls that authentic transformation cannot be imposed from outside. Sustainable solutions arise from listening to the people, respecting cultures, and involving all stakeholders. What applies to the Amazon applies everywhere, including the Mediterranean. Though very different from South America, it too demands renewed attention and organizing from below, without which ecological and other disasters will multiply.

Each shore possesses its own riches, history, memory, and capacity to contribute to the common good. Every city can play a role in building a Mediterranean of Peace. Barcelona is central in this regard. Resources are plentiful, and there is no shortage of talent. Shared responsibility is needed, to change the course of events. Peace is not built solely around diplomatic tables. It is built in cities, in ports, in universities, in local institutions, in popular organizations, in religious communities, and through civil society initiatives.

In Bari in 2020, Pope Francis reminded us that the Mediterranean is a sea of cultural mixing. He denounced the indifference toward this sea that has become a graveyard. In Marseille in 2023, he called urgently for the Mediterranean to once again become a space of fraternity and hope: “For such is its vocation: to be a place where different countries and realities meet on the basis of the humanity we all share, and not on the basis of opposing ideologies. Yes, the Mediterranean embodies a way of thinking that is neither

uniform nor ideological, but multifaceted and rooted in reality; a vital, open, and conciliatory way of thinking: a communal way of thinking”².

In this spirit, I am glad that we can greet one another with this traditional salutation of Christ’s: Peace, Salam, Shalom. Facing increased fragmentation and confrontation, we are here to listen to the immense diversity that surrounds this cradle of humanity. The edifice of peace that our region needs will be built through small steps, stone by stone, by speaking words of appeasement and nurturing our interpersonal relationships, through organizing at the local level, through shared educational projects, cultural exchanges, equitable economic cooperation, and concrete solidarity between the territories on the different shores.

The Mediterranean Meetings have shown how much the voice of young people can open new horizons by fostering new friendships and launching new projects. With them, it is possible to dream, possible to commit. They are the primary protagonists of the future of this common home. They do not want climate disasters. They do not want war. They do not want division. They suffer from closed borders. They look to their elders for help in living together better. The Bishops were the first to enter into this dynamic of listening. They are present, not as outside observers, but as fellow travellers, companions. Together with political and religious leaders, social actors and academics, young people wish to contribute to a shared realization of the Mediterranean common good.

This meeting takes place shortly after the publication of *Magnifica humanitas*. Pope Leo’s message, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, is clear: No to blind and destructive violence. No to the law of force and the domination of a few over many others. Yes to the gentleness and kindness of authentic encounter that respects everyone in their unalienable dignity. We are here “to enter into dialogue with all the men and women of our time.” We are here to “promote the integral development of every human being.” We want to “build together, transforming diversity into a resource and making listening and dialogue the common ground on which to foster justice and fraternity”³.

² Pope Francis, Marseille, 23 September 2023

³ Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, 10