



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

From the Vatican, April 13, 2021

Message for the 11th World Circus Day

Dear Mr. President,

As it is well known, the pastoral care of circus artists is among the tasks of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. On the occasion of the 11th World Circus Day, traditionally promoted by the *Fédération Mondiale du Cirque*, under the high patronage of H.S.H. Princess Stéphanie of Monaco, which will be celebrated on Saturday, April 17, the third Saturday of this month, I wish to express our heartfelt closeness to circus artists and workers, true "artisans of beauty" as Pope Francis defined them on June 16, 2016.

Last year, the Federation decided to postpone the celebration, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Hon. István Ujhelyi MEP, Member of the European Parliament and Honorary Ambassador of the *Fédération Mondiale du Cirque*, together with you and Dr. Helmut Grosscurth, Executive Director of the *European Circus Association*, addressed Hon. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Hon. Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Education and Culture. In the letter, you presented the tragic situation of European circus companies, which employ tens of thousands of artists and host thousands of animals. The protracted emergency situation and bans on gatherings have threatened the very existence of the circus industry and its businesses, which often are family-managed, forcing them to go into debt in the hope of seeing better times. In order to protect this art, which has been performed in Europe for more than 250 years, bringing joy to adults and children, financial support is essential both by the European Union and by each country, who are called to protect the most needy as well as the most vulnerable economic sectors.

Pope Francis asked the Dicastery to be the *focal point* for Covid-19. It is committed to listening to and supporting the particular Churches in the world. Bishops have recalled the physical and psychological suffering caused by the pandemic; the existing crises which have intensified mercilessly also because of the harsh measures that were necessarily adopted to save the most fragile among us; the *burn-out* of those who have been and continue to be at the forefront of the fight against the virus; the disorientation of society as a whole. It will be long and difficult to heal these wounds, and we are all called to do it together.

It was consoling to see that the balm of charity has already been poured on these wounds, thanks to small and great spontaneous or organized actions, carried out by parishes and dioceses,

Dear Sir
Dr. Urs PILZ
President of the *World Circus Federation*
MONK

through *Caritas* and Catholic charitable organizations, who also responded to circus people's requests for survival; in Italy, the Civil Protection and *Coldiretti* were very active, but also private citizens, local administrations and entire towns.

The pandemic reminded us that we are "on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other", as Pope Francis said on March 27, 2020 in an empty and rainy St. Peter's Square. Finding ourselves in this time of trial has shown us once again "that no one is saved alone" and that "in the midst of our tempest, [the Lord] invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering"¹.

In order to ensure that this global suffering is not sterile but acquires meaning, thus helping us to prepare a different future, announcing a renovating change, the Pope encourages us to live it as did the Good Samaritan, a model to build real and new relationships with others. Grief, illness, difficulties of all kinds have revealed to us that "the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions"², a time of brotherhood, a true and powerful antidote to the excluding "throwaway culture". The pandemic has revealed where indifference is leading us, forcing us to choose which path to take, due to the problems and interrelated crises that it brutally exposed. "There are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by... the social and political inertia... is leaving great numbers of the marginalized stranded on the roadside"³. The pandemic is a magnifying glass that reveals old and new vulnerabilities and challenges each and every one of us. We are all called to be co-responsible for transformation processes focusing on the person and creating a culture of inclusion, integration and support. This encourages each one of us to take care of the real difficulties of those in need and who are at risk of marginalization. Only in this way can we discover "the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters"⁴.

Mr. István Ujhelyi MEP had released a very nice video, which on the one hand portrays the suffering of circus performers and workers, while reiterating their willingness to resume painting smiles and happiness on the faces of children and adults⁵. It is the same attitude of the *Rony Roller Circus* which accompanied me to the Hospital of the Pope, *Bambino Gesù*, on January 17, 2020: a joyful gift for the sick children, a precious sentiment treasured in the hearts of circus artists, a celebration of life over pain and suffering, especially that which affects the little ones.

On the occasion of that beautiful moment that we shared with those sick children, I said: "giving a little patient a joyful memory linked to a delicate moment in his/her life means lightening the burden of his/her pain and relieving that of his/her parents. It also entails alleviating hospital

¹ Extraordinary moment of prayer presided over by Pope Francis, March 27, 2020.

² Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, n. 66.

³ *Ibid.*, nos. 70, 71.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 86.

⁵ <https://youtu.be/HQJn7v8UQ1s> Save

staff, offering them a time for joy much needed to nourish the extraordinary mission that they carry out every day in the service of others".

For this reason I ask circus performers of all latitudes who are suffering so much during this pandemic to bring their art, as soon as possible, to the places where children and the elderly suffer. Grandparents and grandchildren are the most frequent spectators under the *chapiteau*, and are unfortunately the ones who have paid a very high price. They are as thirsty as circus workers for an explosion of pure joy, such as the one offered by the circus. Those who are so nobly taking care of their health also need the cherished balm of laughter.

We would like to bring to the Holy Father a tangible sign of these miracles of joy that you will be able to perform wherever you hold your shows: you can send photographs or short films to the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development by mail (Palazzo San Calisto V-00120 Vatican City) or by e-mail (a.silvi@humandevlopment.va).

Allow me to express my heartfelt wishes for this Day, invoking the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary and the divine blessing over the Organizers and the participants. I avail myself of this opportunity to convey my best regards.

Sincerely yours

Peter K.A. Cardinal Turkson

Prefect