



Rome, 2nd october 2021

Speech presenting Faith and Light to Pope Francis

Holy Father Francis,

We are very pleased to welcome this small group representing the whole international family of Faith and Light this morning on the occasion of our 50th anniversary celebration. We are a movement of small communities with people with intellectual disabilities at their core, surrounded by their families and friends. We make our own the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "God has chosen what is weak in the world...".

We know that people with any kind of intellectual disability are a treasure for the Church and for the society. A treasure that cannot be discovered at first sight, but requires encounter, closeness, and friendship. People with an intellectual disability have every right, and above all the right to be loved and accepted as they are. They are privileged witnesses of God's love for every human being.

Faith and Light is present in almost 90 countries. The movement was born out of a pilgrimage to Lourdes during Holy Week 1971, coordinated by Jean Vanier and Marie-Hélène Mathieu. This event marked the beginning of the life of our communities. Over the years, many families and friends have joined us, and many challenges have been faced and overcome, from the adaptation of churches and other places of worship for greater accessibility to the conviction that people with disabilities, beyond being objects of charity or pity, have a specific vocation in the Church.

During this period, we have consolidated our mission and vision. We have witnessed stories of overcoming difficulties, courage, friendship, love... And in all this, we have seen God's love reflected in a special way in the most

fragile and vulnerable people. With people with intellectual disabilities, we also learn to know and accept our own disabilities, which are many and varied. We are an ecumenical family, including Christian communities from all traditions. This helps us to know and love each other better.

Today, we are facing different difficulties for our communities: the pandemic is proving to be a difficult experience for all of us, limiting our desire to meet face-to-face. But also, the legislative and moral reality of so many countries where the "disposable culture" towards the most fragile is very present. The ageing without renewal of many communities, the economic difficulties of so many families and countries, and finally, the growing culture of mistrust and fear, as well as comfort and indifference, in which community or associative initiatives are becoming increasingly rare.

But alongside these difficulties, we experience hope in a very special way. Faith and Light communities are very joyful and festive. We know that what seems to be a problem can be a gift and an opportunity: we just have to look at it with the eyes of God. At Faith and Light we share and celebrate faith, and any excuse is good to get together and celebrate life too. We don't do things for people with disabilities, we do things with them. We have each other but above all we have Jesus Christ, the true centre of our communities. We know that he is in our boat, just like the first disciples of Jesus, even if sometimes he seems to be sleeping. In the midst of the storm and the tempest, he is there to tell us not to be afraid.

We know that Faith and Light communities are not called to be a solution to the difficulties of disability, but we are called to be a sign. A sign of light and hope in the midst of the world, in the social, political and ecclesial context in which each community lives. To be witnesses of friendship with and in Jesus because many people feel alone and do not find a place where they can be recognised and welcomed. In this apparent poverty of what we are and what we do, we know that there is the Holy Spirit who pushes us, encourages us and fills our hearts with confidence, reaffirming our mission. And it is precisely in being small that the greatness of the Lord is more perceptible.

Holy Father, we need your encouragement, your welcome and your impetus. Here we are, Your Holiness: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening". And on behalf of all the Faith and Light communities around the world, I give you a big hug, not big, but an enormous hug... In the way that only our friends with intellectual disabilities know how to do. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Raúl Izquierdo García
Faith and Light international coordinator