



# ***HOLY FATHER'S SPEECH***

**Faith and Light Audience**

**(2 October 2021)**

Dear brothers and sisters, hello!

I welcome you and thank Mr Raul Izquierdo Garcia, your International Coordinator, for his introductory words. You are celebrating your Jubilee: it is a great opportunity to give thanks, to recognise the gifts that the Lord has given you throughout the years of this journey and to express your gratitude. And at the same time, this Jubilee also becomes an opportunity to look to the future, to the task that the Holy Spirit still entrusts to you with the fruits that the Church still awaits from Faith and Light, because of the vocation and mission received from the Lord.

Fifty years have gone by since that pilgrimage to Lourdes at Easter 1971, to which people with intellectual disabilities, their families and many friends were invited. From that moment, beneath the loving gaze of Mary, the Faith and Light experiment began: the Holy Spirit proposed the birth of something that no-one had anticipated, that is to say, your communities where you celebrate joy, reconciliation and reciprocal communion. Thus, the light and the strength of the risen Lord has given Hope to many people who felt excluded and rejected, sometimes in the Church too.

From that moment, the Holy Spirit accompanied the journey of your Movement and many “Faith and Light” communities were born in many countries on the five continents, carrying a message of love and welcome. This message is the heart of the Gospel! It reminds us that any person, even and especially the smallest and frailest, is loved by God and has their place in the Church and in the world. It is “the Gospel of smallness”, as St Paul reminds us when he writes to the Corinthians: “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is

foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (I Co 1, 26-29).

The presence of Faith and Light has been and is a prophecy because the most fragile people are often rejected and regarded as useless. And your prophecy is even more important today, to fight the culture of rejection and to remind everyone that diversity is an asset and must never become grounds for exclusion and discrimination.

We can look at these fifty years of Faith and Light as a great pilgrimage, as an ideal continuation of the first pilgrimage. And it is also an ecumenical journey because people from different Christian denominations meet in your communities: Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox... A sign of communion, a tangible seed of unity. It is precisely the most fragile people who become a source of reconciliation because they call us all to a path of conversion.

The road that you have taken is long and full of fruits but still today in the Church and the world, there are many who, in smallness and fragility, are forgotten and excluded. This is why I encourage you to continue your welcoming presence with the power of the Holy Spirit: may your communities always be places of meeting, of human advancement and celebration for all those who still feel marginalised and abandoned. For the families who are experiencing the birth of a child with disabilities, may you be a sign of hope so that no one shuts themselves away in sadness and despair.

Within Christian communities, I invite you to have a leaven gospel way of doing things: do not isolate or shut yourself

away but take part in Church life in the parishes and districts, bring your experience and bear witness to the choice of God for the last, the small and the excluded. May the spirit of communion and friendship that is part of your charisma, always make you instruments of reconciliation and peace, especially where there are conflicts and divisions.

The emblem that represents your experience, your “logo” is a boat on a rough sea whilst the sun rises above the clouds after the storm.

During this pandemic, I have remembered several times, thinking about the Gospel story of the disciples in the storm, that we are all in the same boat; and I therefore confirm you in your commitment: to be, in the storms that the people and their families experience, a small boat on which everyone can find a place, in the certainty that the Lord Jesus is on this boat. May the sun of faith and hope that rises above the clouds of our fears and insecurities accompany you always on the journey that still awaits you. May the Lord bless you and the Virgin Mary watch over you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!