Democracy:
For everything. For everyone.

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DEMOCRACY was born in ancient Greece, at the end of the sixth century BCE, in the *polis* (city) of Athens. The term "democracy" comes from the Greek words *dēmos* (people) and *kratos* (power or government): ***government of and for the people.*** It emerged as a revolutionary political experiment intended to replace autocratic and oligarchic regimes with a structure ***in which decision-making would favor the common good and rest in the hands of the citizens.***

In this ***ancient or "direct" democracy***, citizens of the *polis* personally attended the Assembly to vote on laws, wars, and budgets. However, it had severe limitations: women, enslaved people, and foreigners were excluded.

Modern or "representative" democracy emerged between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, influenced and driven especially by the Glorious Revolution, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. This variation on ancient democracy delegates power to representatives elected through suffrage and guarantees rights within a constitutional framework.

Both ***ancient and modern democracy positively transformed political leadership, the exercise of power, and the social organization of humanity*** by limiting and controlling absolute power, establishing the separation of powers (executive, legislative, and judicial), and recognizing universal human rights. This, in turn, brought about the recognition, for "citizens," of their civic, political, and social rights and responsibilities, as well as the peaceful resolution of conflicts, replacing institutional violence and wars with public debate, participation, elections, consensus-building, dialogue, and negotiations.

Furthermore, democracy makes possible the legal frameworks that protect individual freedoms from the tyrannical abuse of majorities, as well as ideological pluralism, religious freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of association, and political tolerance. The promotion of human and social development is another cornerstone of democracy, achieved through legal stability, social investment, and public accountability.

Today, DEMOCRACY, as a political system and form of government, is in crisis because the positive aspects or foundations cited above that enable democracy are themselves in crisis. It is evident and undeniable that democracy in the twenty-first century faces a combination of institutional, technological, and socioeconomic threats.

During the twentieth century, democracies fell primarily as a result of coups d'état or violent military coups. Today, the deterioration of democracy and governments labeled as democratic comes ***from within the system itself***, through gradual processes of institutional erosion and corruption carried out by democratically elected "representative" leaders.

Today, the truth citizens need to make responsible and sound electoral decisions is threatened and being replaced by lies, fake news, and all forms of immorality and discrediting through the mass disinformation of political campaigns, facilitated by technological manipulation. The lack of civic ethics and democratic convictions among social leaders also encourages the emergence of populists and autocratic populism who, **once elected,** systematically dismantle democratic checks and balances (independent courts, a free press, etc.).

The growing economic gap between rich and poor, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, produce an unequal distribution of political influence and give economically privileged sectors a greater ability to influence and manipulate public policies and electoral outcomes.

In this way, distrust and disillusionment take hold, along with apathy and indifference toward politics among those who see electoral promises go unfulfilled and their fundamental, everyday problems left unresolved.

Political activity then becomes a form of violent political tribalism, a pitched battle to secure privileges for a few at the expense of the majority. In this struggle, political opponents are perceived as enemies, leading to polarization and social fragmentation.

All this generates the existence of regimes with the title and façade of "democratic" systems when in reality they are ***autocratic*** systems (in which supreme power is concentrated, absolutely, within a single person) or systems of ***oligarchic*** government (in which supreme authority, decision-making and the exercise of power benefit the few).

What should be done confronting this violent panorama of corruption, degeneration, discredit, lack of credibility and this crisis of DEMOCRACY? What can be done to defend, protect, and renew democracy? The answers, rather than defending traditional rules, must point towards structural reforms of the democratic system through, for example, the creation of citizen participation systems (representative and expert citizen assemblies or referendums) to advise legislative institutions on issues such as climate change, budget allocation, tax reforms, ethics in artificial intelligence, etc., regulation of digital ecosystems and electoral cybersecurity, shielding of institutions and independent counterweights, regulation of the financing of electoral campaigns, and ongoing civic and ethical education, etc.

In his work "The Republic" (in Book VIII), the great Greek thinker Plato says that the insatiable desire for what democracy considers its greatest good – absolute freedom – is precisely what destroys it; so ***democracy*** – according to Plato – ***can become despotism***: a form of government and attitude by which the ruler exercises absolute power, without legal or constitutional limits, acting arbitrarily and abusively.

We still have time to rethink, together, this notion of "absolute freedom," both for those who govern and those who are governed. Absolute freedom, which, rather than making democratic leaders of those who govern, turns them into tyrants; and rather than making our societies places of dignified, humane, fraternal, and compassionate coexistence, turns them into anarchic states, mired in perpetual chaos and fratricidal strife.

In this need for democratic awareness and education, it is especially beneficial for us to return to the encyclical ***"Fratelli Tutti,"*** in which Pope Francis addressed **DEMOCRACY** not merely as a mechanism for a few people to cast votes or as a formal system of government, but as ***an ethical project and a space for encounter, dialogue, and shared responsibility in the pursuit of the common good.*** He understood the practice of democratic politics as ***"political charity,"*** that is, as a "most lofty vocation" ***and one of the most precious forms of love for one's neighbor, directed toward the dignity of every person and, especially, the poor.***