



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING OF THE LAUDATO SI' COMMUNITIES

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 12 September 2020*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

I welcome you, and in greeting you I wish to reach all the members of the *Laudato Si' Communities* in Italy and throughout the world. I thank Mr Carlo Petrini in my paternal, not maternal language: “Carlin”. You have placed *integral ecology* proposed by the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* as the driving force behind all your initiatives. Integral, because we are all creatures and everything in creation is related; all is related. I would dare say, everything is in harmony. Even the pandemic has demonstrated this: the health of humanity cannot be separated from that of the environment in which we live. It is also clear that climate change not only upsets the balance of nature, but also causes poverty and hunger, afflicting the most vulnerable and sometimes forcing them to leave their land. The neglect of creation and social injustices influence each other: we can say that there is no ecology without equality and there is no equality without ecology.

You are motivated to take care of the least among us and of creation together, and you choose to do so following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, with meekness and industriousness. I thank you for this and I renew my appeal for a commitment to safeguarding our common home. This task concerns everyone, especially those responsible for nations and productive activities. We need the genuine will to tackle the root causes of the climate upheavals that are happening. Generic commitments — words, words ... — are not enough, and one cannot look only as far as the immediate consent of one's voters or investors. We must look far ahead, or history will not forgive us. We need to work today for everyone's future. Young people and the poor will hold us to account. It is our challenge. I will borrow a phrase from martyred theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Our challenge today is not how to get out of this, how to emerge from this reality; our true

challenge is what life will be like for future generations. We have to think about this!

Dear friends, now I would like to share with you two key words of integral ecology: *contemplation* and *compassion*.

Contemplation. Today, the nature that surrounds us is no longer admired, contemplated, but “devoured”. We have become voracious, dependent on immediate profit and results, and at any cost. Our outlook on reality is increasingly rapid, distracted, superficial, while news and forests are burnt in a short time. Sick with consumerism. This is our illness! Sick with consumerism. We are eager to have the latest “*app*”, but no longer know the names of our neighbours, much less how to distinguish one tree from another. And what is more serious, we lose our roots with this lifestyle, we lose our gratitude for what there is and for who gave it to us. So as not to forget, we must return to contemplation; so as not to be distracted by a thousand useless things, we must find silence again; for the heart not to become sick, we must be still. It is not easy. It is necessary, for example, to free ourselves from the imprisonment of the mobile phone, to look into the eyes of those who are next to us and the creation that has been given to us.

To contemplate is to grant oneself the time to be silent, to pray, to restore harmony to the soul, the healthy balance between head, heart and hands, between thought, feeling and action. Contemplation is the antidote to hasty, superficial and inconclusive choices. Those who contemplate learn to feel the ground that sustains them, to understand that they are not alone and without meaning in the world. They discover the tenderness of God’s gaze and understand that they are precious. Everyone is important in God’s eyes, everyone can transform a part of the world polluted by human voracity into the good reality willed by the Creator. Those who know how to contemplate in fact, do not remain with their hands in their pockets, but instead do something tangible. Contemplation leads one to perform an action, to do.

Here, then, is the second word: *compassion*. It is the fruit of contemplation. How can we tell whether someone is contemplative, if someone has assimilated God’s outlook? If someone has compassion for others, — compassion is not saying “I feel bad for this one...”, compassion is to “suffer with” — if someone goes beyond excuses and theories in order to see others as brothers and sisters to be protected. What Carlo Petrini said earlier about brotherhood. This is the proof, because this is what God’s gaze does. Despite all the evil we think and do, he always sees us as his beloved children. He does not see individuals, but sons and daughters. He sees us as brothers and sisters of a single family living in the same house. We are never strangers to his eyes. His compassion is the opposite of our indifference. Indifference — allow me to say something a bit vulgar — is that lack of care that enters the heart, the mentality that ends up in “they can deal with it”. Compassion is the opposite of indifference.

This applies to us too: our compassion is the best vaccine against the epidemic of indifference. “It has nothing to do with me”, “it is not up to me”, “it does not concern me”, “it’s their thing”: these are

the symptoms of indifference. There is a beautiful photograph — I have mentioned it in the past — taken by a Roman photographer, It is in the Office of Papal Charities. It shows an older woman coming out of a fancy restaurant on a winter night, with her fur coat, hat and gloves, well protected from the cold, after having eaten well — it is not a sin to eat well! [laughter] — and there is another woman at the door on crutches, poorly dressed, one can tell that she is cold .. a *homeless* person, with her hand extended... And the woman who comes out of the restaurant looks the other way. The photograph is called “Indifference”. When I saw it, I called the photographer to tell him: “You were good in taking this [photograph] so spontaneously”, and I asked that it be put in the Office of Papal Charities. So as not to fall into the spirit of indifference. Those who have compassion instead pass from “you do not matter to me” to “you are important to me”, or at least “you touch my heart”. However, compassion is not a nice sentiment, it is not pietism; it is creating new bonds with others. And taking responsibility for them, like the Good Samaritan who, *moved by compassion*, takes care of the unfortunate man he does not even know (cf. *Lk 10:33-34*). The world needs this creative and active charity, people who do not remain in front of a screen making comments, but who are willing to get their hands dirty to remove degradation and restore dignity. Having compassion is a choice: it is choosing to have no enemies, so as to see everyone as *my neighbour*. And this is a choice.

This does not mean becoming weak and giving up the fight. Rather, those who have compassion enter into a daily struggle against *rejection and waste*, discarding others and discarding things. It hurts to think of how many people are discarded without compassion: the elderly, children, workers, persons with disabilities.... Wasting things is also scandalous. The FAO has documented that in one year more than a billion tonnes of edible food is thrown away in industrialized countries — more than one billion! This is the reality. Together let us help each other to fight against rejection and waste; let us demand political decisions that combine progress and equality, development and sustainability for everyone, so that no one will be deprived of the land we inhabit, the good air we breathe, the water we have the right to drink and the food we have the right to eat.

I am sure that the members of each of your Communities will not settle to live as spectators, but will always be meek and determined protagonists in building the future for all. And all this makes fraternity. Working like and as brothers. Building a universal fraternity. And this is the moment, this is the challenge today. My wish for you is that you may nurture contemplation and compassion, indispensable ingredients of integral ecology. Thank you again for your presence and for your commitment. Thank you for your prayers. Those of you who pray, I ask you to pray, and to those of you who do not pray, at least send me some good vibes. I need them! [Laughter]

And now I would ask God to bless each of you, bless the heart of each of you, whether a believer or a non believer, of any religious tradition. May God bless you all. Amen.

