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Audience with participants in the International Conference “Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth” on the third anniversary of the Encyclical “Laudato si”

At 9.30 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Conference *Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth*, on the third anniversary of the Holy Father Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si’*, taking place in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 5 to 6 July 2018:

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome all of you assembled for this International Conference marking the third anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* on care for our common home. In a special way, I would like to greet His Eminence Archbishop Zizioulas, because he and Cardinal Turkson together presented the Encyclical three years ago. I thank all of you for coming together to “*hear with your hearts*” the increasingly desperate cries of the earth and its poor, who look for our help and concern. You have also gathered to testify to the urgent need to respond to the Encyclical’s call for *change*, for an *ecological conversion*. Your presence here is the sign of your commitment to take concrete steps to save the planet and the life it sustains, inspired by the Encyclical’s assumption that “everything is connected”. That principle lies at the heart of an integral ecology.

Here we can think back on the call that Francis of Assisi received from the Lord in the little church of San Damiano: “*Go and repair my house, which, as you can see, lies in ruins*”. Today, the “common home” of our planet also needs urgently to be repaired and secured for a sustainable future.

In recent decades, the scientific community has developed increasingly accurate assessments in this regard. Indeed, “the pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world” (*Laudato Si’*, 161). There is a real danger that we will leave future generations only rubble, deserts and refuse.

So I express my hope that concern for the state of our common home will translate into systematic and concerted efforts aimed at an integral ecology. For “the effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now” (*ibid.*). Humanity has the knowledge and the means to cooperate in responsibly “cultivating and protecting” the earth. Significantly, your discussions have addressed some of this year’s important steps in this direction.

The COP24 Summit, to be held in Katowice, Poland, in December, could prove a milestone on the path set out by the 2015 Paris Agreement. We all know that much still needs to be done to implement that Agreement. All governments should strive to honour the commitments made in Paris, in order to avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis. “Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most” (*ibid.*, 169), and we cannot afford to waste time.

Along with states, local authorities, civil society, and economic and religious institutions can promote the culture and practice of an integral ecology. I trust that events such as the Global Climate Action Summit, to be held from 12-14 September in San Francisco, will provide suitable responses, with the support of *citizens’ pressure groups* worldwide. As I observed, along with His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, and unless we give priority to solidarity and service” (*Message for the World Day of Prayer for Creation*, 1 September 2017).

Financial institutions, too, have an important role to play, as part both of the problem and its solution. A financial paradigm shift is needed, for the sake of promoting integral human development. International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank can encourage effective reforms for more inclusive and sustainable development. It is to be hoped that “finance... will go back to being an instrument directed towards improved wealth creation and development” (BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 65), as well as towards care for the environment.

All these actions presuppose a transformation on a deeper level, namely a change of hearts and minds. In the words of Saint John Paul II: “We must encourage and support an ‘*ecological conversion*’” (*Catechesis*, 17 January 2001). Here the religions, and the Christian Churches in particular, have a key role to play. The Day of Prayer for Creation and its associated initiatives, begun in the Orthodox Church, are beginning to spread among Christian communities throughout the world.

Finally, dialogue and commitment to our common home must make special room for two groups of people at the forefront of efforts to foster an integral ecology. Both will be at the centre of the next two Synods of the Catholic Church: young people and indigenous peoples, especially those from the Amazon region.

On the one hand, “Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded” (*Laudato Si’*, 13). It is the young who will have to face the consequences of the current environmental and climate crisis. Consequently, intergenerational solidarity “is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (*ibid.*, 159).

Then too, “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions” (*ibid.*, 146). It grieves us to see the lands of indigenous peoples expropriated and their cultures trampled on by predatory schemes and by new forms of colonialism, fuelled by the culture of waste and consumerism (cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, 8 June 2018). “For

them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values” (*Laudato Si'*, 146). How much we can learn from them! The lives of indigenous peoples “are a living memory of the mission that God has entrusted to us all: the protection of our common home” (*Address*, Puerto Maldonado, Peru, 19 January 2018).

Dear brothers and sisters, challenges are not lacking! I express my heartfelt gratitude for your efforts in the service of care for creation and a better future for our children and grandchildren. Sometimes it might seem too arduous a task, since “there are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected” (*Laudato Si'*, 54). Yet “human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (*ibid.*, 205). Please continue to work for “the radical change which present circumstances require” (*ibid.*, 171). For “injustice is not invincible” (*ibid.*, 74).

May Saint Francis of Assisi continue to inspire and guide us on this journey, and “may our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope” (*ibid.*, 244). After all, that hope is based on our faith in the power of our heavenly Father. He, “who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!” (*ibid.*, 245).

To all of you I impart my blessing. And please, remember to pray for me.

Thank you!
