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Audience with participants in the meeting of the *Laudato si'* Communities

Today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting of the *Laudato si'* Communities.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

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. You have placed the 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; everything is related. 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: it may be said 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, and you choose to do so following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, with meekness and industriousness, 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 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, otherwise history will not forgive us. We need to work today for everyone's future. Young people and the poor will hold us to account.

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, 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. Sickened by consumption, 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; 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 gift oneself with time to be silent, to pray, to restore harmony, the healthy balance between head, heart and hands, between thought, feeling and action, to the soul. 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 do not remain with their hands in their pockets, but instead find something tangible to do.

Here, then, is the second word: *compassion*. It is the fruit of contemplation. How is it understood that someone is contemplative, if someone has assimilated God’s outlook? If someone has compassion for others, if someone goes beyond excuses and theories in order to see others as brothers and sisters to be protected. This is the proof, because this is what God’s gaze does, who despite all the evil we think and do, 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.

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”: these are the symptoms of indifference. Those who have compassion instead pass from “you do not matter to me” to “you are important to me”. However, compassion is not just 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 (see *Lk 10:33-34*). The world needs this creative and active charity, people who do not stay 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 a *neighbour*.

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 industrialised countries! 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 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 every one of your Communities would not settle to live as spectators, but will be meek and determined protagonists in building the future for all. 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. I bless you and ask you, please, to pray for me.
