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Video Message of the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the international meeting “Economy of Francesco - Pope Francis and young people, a commitment, the future” (Assisi, 19 to 21 November 2020)

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the international meeting, “Economy of Francesco - Pope Francis and young people, a commitment, the future”, at the end of the event which was streamed live from Assisi in live streaming from 19 to 21 November 2020:

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear young people, good afternoon!

Thank you for being there, for all the work you have done, and for the efforts you have made over the past months, despite changes in our programme. You did not lose heart, and in fact I have appreciated the level of reflection, precision and seriousness with which you have worked. You brought to it all of your passion for the things that excite you, cause you concern, make you indignant and urge you to work for change.

Our original idea was to meet in Assisi, to find inspiration in the footsteps of Saint Francis. In the crucifix at San Damiano, and in many other faces – like that of the leper – the Lord came to Francis, called him and gave him a mission. He empowered Francis to cast off the idols that had isolated him from others, the questions and doubts that had paralyzed him and kept him trapped in thinking “this is the way things have always been done” (for that is a trap!), or in the bittersweet melancholy of those caught up only in themselves. The Lord made it possible for Francis to intone a hymn of praise, an expression of his joy, freedom and self-giving. I consider this virtual meeting in Assisi not as an endpoint, but rather the beginning of a process that we are asked to undertake together as a *vocation*, a *culture* and a *covenant*.

The vocation of Assisi

“Francis, go and repair my house, which you can see is in ruins”. These were the words that so stirred the young

Francis, and have become a special summons addressed to each one of us. When you feel called to share actively in the building of a new “normal”, you respond by saying “yes” and this is a source of great hope. I know that you immediately accepted this invitation because you yourselves are in a position to realize that things cannot go on the way they are. This was evident from your interest and your active participation in this covenant, which has surpassed all expectations. You showed a personal interest in identifying the crucial issues we are facing, and you did this from a particular perspective: that of the economy, which is your area of research, study and work. You recognize the *urgent need for a different economic narrative*, for a responsible realization that “the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view”[1] and is harming our sister earth, so gravely maltreated and despoiled, together with the poor and the excluded in our midst. Those two things go together: if you harm the earth, the number of poor and excluded increases. They are the first to be hurt... and the first to be forgotten.

Be careful, though, not to be talked into believing that this is just another banal problem. Your voice is much more than an empty, passing outcry that can be quelled with the passage of time. Rather, you are called to have a concrete impact on cities and universities, workplaces and unions, businesses and movements, public and private offices, and to work with intelligence, commitment and conviction in order to reach the centres where ideas and paradigms[2] are developed and decided. That is why I have invited you to make this covenant. The gravity of the present situation, made all the more evident by the Covid pandemic, demands that a responsible stand be taken by all social actors, all of us, with yourselves in the forefront. The effects of our actions and decisions will affect you personally. Consequently, you cannot remain outside the centres that are shaping not only your future, but also, I am convinced, your present. You cannot absent yourselves from those places where the present and future are generated. You are either part of them or history will pass you by.

A new culture

We need change; we want change and we seek change.[3] But the problem arises when we realize that we lack adequate and inclusive answers to many of our current problems. Indeed, we experience a certain fragmentation in our analyses and diagnoses that ends up blocking every possible solution. Deep down, we lack the *culture* required to inspire and encourage different visions marked by theoretical approaches, politics, educational programmes and indeed spirituality, that cannot be fit into a single dominant mindset.[4] Given the urgent need to come up with answers, it is indispensable to promote and support leadership groups capable of shaping culture, sparking processes – remember that word: processes – blazing trails, broadening horizons and building common bonds... Every effort to organize, care for and improve our common home, if it is to be meaningful, will also demand a change in “life-style, models of production and consumption, and established structures of power which today govern societies”.[5] Without this, you will accomplish nothing.

We need, on the local and institutional levels, leadership groups that can take up problems without becoming trapped or frustrated by them, and in this way challenge the tendency – often unconscious – to submit to certain ideological ways of thinking that end up justifying injustices and paralyzing all efforts to combat them. As an example, we can think of hunger, which, as Benedict XVI rightly pointed out, “is not so much dependent on a lack of material resources as on a shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional”. [6] If you are able to resolve this problem, you will open up a path to the future. Let me repeat those words of Pope Benedict: hunger depends less on lack of material resources than on the lack of social resources, the most important of which are institutional.

The social and economic crisis that many people are experiencing at first hand, and that is mortgaging the present and the future by the abandonment and exclusion of many children, adolescents and entire families, makes it intolerable for us to privilege sectorial interests to the detriment of the common good. We need to recover a sense of the common good. Here I would bring up an exercise that you have experimented with as a method for a sound and revolutionary resolution of conflicts. In these months, you have shared a number of reflections and significant theoretical models. You have considered twelve problems (the “villages” as you call them) in order to debate, discuss and identify practical approaches to resolving them. You have experienced the urgently needed *culture of encounter*, which is the opposite of the *throwaway culture* now in vogue. This culture of encounter makes it possible for many voices to be heard around the same table, in order to dialogue, consider, discuss and formulate, in a polyhedral perspective, different aspects and possible responses to global

problems involving our peoples and our democracies.[7] It is not easy to move towards real solutions when those who do not think like ourselves are discredited, slandered and misquoted! Discrediting, slandering and misquoting are cowardly ways of refusing to make the decisions needed to solve many problems. Let us never forget that “the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts”,[8] and that “the mere sum of individual interests is not capable of generating a better world for the whole human family”.[9]

This exercise – encountering one another aside from all legitimate differences – is the first step towards any change that can help generate a new cultural and consequently economic, political and social mentality. For you will never be able to undertake great things solely from a theoretical or individual perspective, without a spirit that drives you, without meaningful interior motivations, without a sense of belonging and rootedness that can enhance personal and communal activities.[10]

The future will thus prove an exciting time that summons us to acknowledge the urgency and the beauty of the challenges lying before us. A time that reminds us that we are not condemned to economic models whose immediate interest is limited to profit and promoting favourable public policies, unconcerned with their human, social and environmental cost.[11] Policies that assume we can count on an absolute, unlimited and indifferent availability of resources. We are not forced to continue to think, or quietly accept by our way of acting, that “some feel more human than others, as if they were born with greater rights”[12] or privileges for the guaranteed enjoyment of determined essential goods or services.[13] Nor is it sufficient to trust in the search for palliatives in the third sector or in philanthropic models. Although their efforts are crucial, they are not always capable of confronting structurally the current imbalances, which affect those most excluded, and they unintentionally perpetuate the very injustices they seek to combat. Nor is it simply or exclusively a matter of meeting the most essential needs of our brothers and sisters. We need to accept structurally that the poor have sufficient dignity to sit at our meetings, participate in our discussions and bring bread to their own tables. It is about much more than “social assistance” or “welfare”: we are speaking of a conversion and transformation of our priorities and of the place of others in our policies and in the social order.

Today, well into the twenty-first century, “it is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside, or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it”.[14] Think about this: exclusion strikes at the root of what it means to be a part of the society in which we live, since those who are excluded are no longer society’s underside, or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. This is the culture of waste, which not only discards, but makes others feel discarded, rendered invisible on the other side of the wall of indifference and comfort.

I remember the first time I saw a closed neighbourhood: I didn’t know they existed. I had to visit the Jesuit novitiates, and in one country, as I passed through the city, they told me: “You can’t go to that part, because it is a closed neighbourhood”. Inside, there were walls, houses and streets, but closed off: a neighbourhood living in indifference. I was quite struck by this. But afterwards those neighbourhoods grew and kept growing, everywhere. Let me ask you: is your heart like a closed neighbourhood?

The Assisi covenant

Certain questions can no longer be deferred. The enormous and urgent task of facing them demands generous commitment in the areas of culture, academic training and scientific research, and a refusal to indulge in intellectual fashions or ideological positions, little islands that isolate us from life and from the real suffering of people.[15] Dear young economists, entrepreneurs, workers and business leaders, the time has come to take up the challenge of promoting and encouraging models of development, progress and sustainability in which people, especially the excluded (including our sister earth), will no longer be – at most – a merely nominal, technical or functional presence. Instead, they will become protagonists in their own lives and in the entire fabric of society.

This calls for more than empty words: “the poor” and “the excluded” are real people. Instead of viewing them from a merely technical or functional standpoint, it is time to let them become protagonists in their own lives and

in the fabric of society as a whole. Let us not think *for* them, but *with* them. Not acting, according to the model of the Enlightenment, as enlightened élites, where everything is done *for* the people, but nothing *with* the people. This is not acceptable. Let us, then, not think *for* them, but *with* them. Let us learn from them how to propose economic models that will benefit everyone, since their structural and decisional approaches will be determined by the *integral human development* clearly set forth by the Church's social doctrine. Politics and economics must not "be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is an urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life".[16] Lacking such focus and direction, we would remain prisoners of an alienating circularity that would perpetuate only dynamics of degradation, exclusion, violence and polarization. "Every program organized to increase productivity should have but one aim: to serve persons. They should reduce forms of inequality, eliminate discrimination, free people from the bonds of servitude... It is not enough to increase the general fund of wealth and then distribute it more fairly. This is not enough. Nor is it enough to develop technology so that the earth may become a more fitting dwelling place for human beings".[17] This too is not enough.

The approach of *integral human development* is good news to be proclaimed and put into practice. Not a dream, but a concrete path: good news to be proclaimed and put into practice, for it proposes that we rediscover our common humanity on the basis of the best of ourselves, namely, God's dream that we learn to be keepers of our brothers and sisters and those most vulnerable (cf. *Gen 4:9*). "The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true for both individuals and for society".[18] The measure of humanity: a measure that must be embodied in our decisions and our economic models.

How reassuring it is to hear once more the words of Saint Paul VI, who in his desire that the Gospel message permeate and guide all human realities, wrote that "development cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well-rounded; it must foster the development of *each person and of the whole person*... We cannot allow economics to be separated from human realities, nor development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts for us is man, each individual man and woman, each human group, and humanity as a whole".[19]

Many of you will have the ability to affect and shape macro-economic decisions involving the destiny of many nations. Here too, there is great need for individuals who are well-prepared, "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (*Mt 10:16*). Individuals capable of caring for "the sustainable development of countries and [ensuring] that they are not subjected to oppressive lending systems which, far from promoting progress, subject people to mechanisms which generate greater poverty, exclusion and dependence".[20] Lending systems, by themselves, lead to poverty and dependence. It is legitimate to call for the development of a model of international solidarity capable of acknowledging and respecting interdependence between nations and favouring mechanisms of control that prevent any kind of subjection. And working for the promotion of the most disadvantaged and developing countries, for every people is called to become the artisan of its own destiny and that of the entire world.[21]

Dear young people, "today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment".[22] An unpredictable future is already dawning. Each of you, starting from the places in which you work and make decisions, can accomplish much. Do not seek shortcuts, however attractive, that prevent you from getting involved and being a leaven wherever you find yourselves (cf. *Lk 13:20-21*). No shortcuts! Be a leaven! Roll up your sleeves! Once the present health crisis has passed, the worst reaction would be to fall even more deeply into feverish consumerism and forms of selfish self-protection. Remember: we never emerge from a crisis unaffected: either we end up better or worse. Let us foster what is good, make the most of this moment and place ourselves at the service of the common good. God grant that in the end there will no longer be "others", but that we adopt a style of life where we can speak only of "us".[23] Of a great "us". Not of a petty "us" and then of "others". That will not do.

History teaches us that no system or crisis can completely suppress the abilities, ingenuity and creativity that God constantly awakens within us. With dedication and fidelity to your peoples, and to your present and future, you can join others in forging new ways to make history. Do not be afraid to get involved and touch the soul of your cities with the gaze of Jesus. Do not fear to enter courageously the conflicts and crossroads of history in order to anoint them with the fragrance of the Beatitudes. Do not fear, for *no one is saved alone*. You are young people from 115 countries. I ask you to recognize our need for one another in giving birth to an economic culture able “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire in young people – all young people, with no one excluded – a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel”.^[24]

Thank you!

[1] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 61. Hereafter, *LS*.

[2] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 74. Hereafter, *GE*.

[3] Cf. *Address for the World Meeting of Popular Movements*, Santa Cruz de Sierra, 9 July 2015.

[4] Cf. *LS*, 111

[5] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 58.

[6] Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 27.

[7] Cf. *Address to the Seminar “New Forms of Solidarity towards Fraternal Inclusion, Integration and Innovation”*, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (5 February 2020). Let us recall that “true wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data, which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution” (*LS*, 47).

[8] *EG*, 235

[9] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 105. Hereafter, *FT*.

[10] Cf. *LS*, 216.

[11] Favouring, when necessary, fiscal evasion, lack of respect for the rights of workers, and “the possibility of corruption by some of the largest world businesses, not infrequently in collusion with the governing political sector” (*Address to the Seminar “New Forms of Solidarity towards Fraternal Inclusion, Integration and Innovation”*, cited above).

[12] *LS*, 90. For example, “to blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes it has the right to consume in a way that can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption” (*LS*, 50).

[13] Although all of us are endowed with the same dignity, not all of us start from the same place and with the same possibilities when we consider the social order. This challenges us to consider ways to make freedom and equality not a merely nominal datum that lends itself to favouring injustice (cf. *FT*, 21-23). We would do well to ask ourselves: “What happens when fraternity is not consciously cultivated, when there is a lack of political will to

promote it through education in fraternity, through dialogue and through the recognition of the values of reciprocity and mutual enrichment?" (*FT*, 103).

[14] *EG*, 53. In a world of virtual possibilities, changes and fragmentation, social rights cannot only be exhortations or empty appeals but must be a beacon and compass for the way, for "the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life" (*LS*, 142).

[15] Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (8 December 2017), 3.

[16] *LS*, 189.

[17] SAINT PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 34. Hereafter, *PP*.

[18] BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), 38.

[19] *PP*, 14.

[20] *Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (25 September 2015).

[21] Cf. *PP*, 65.

[22] *FT*, 77.

[23] Cf. *ibid.*, 35.

[24] *Opening Address at the Synod for Young People* (3 October 2018).
