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Audience with the promoters of the Green and Blue Festival, on the occasion of World Environment Day

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the promoters of the Green and Blue Festival, on the occasion of World Environment Day.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

More than fifty years have passed since the inauguration, in Stockholm on 5 June 1972, of the first great United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. It paved the way for various assemblies that called on the international community to discuss how humanity is managing our common home. This is why 5 June became World Environment Day. I do not forget, when I went to Strasbourg, that the then-President Holland had invited the Minister of the Environment, Ms. Ségolène Royal, to receive me, and there she told me she had heard I was writing something on the environment. I said yes, that I was thinking with a group of scientists and also with a group of theologians. And she said this: "Please, publish it before the Paris Conference". And so, it was done. And Paris was truly a good meeting, not because of this document of mine, but because the meeting was of a high level. After Paris, unfortunately... And this worries me.

In this half-century many things have changed; just think of the advent of the new technologies, the impact of transversal and global phenomena such as the pandemic, the transformation of an "ever more globalized" society that "makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers".[1] We have witnessed an "increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature", developing a "growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet" (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 19). Experts have made it clear that the choices and actions implemented in this decade will have an impact for thousands of years.[2] Our knowledge of the impact of our actions on our common home and on those who inhabit and will inhabit it has

expanded. This has also increased our sense of responsibility before God, who entrusted the care of creation to us, before our neighbour and before future generations.

“Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities” (*ibid.*).

The phenomenon of climate change reminds us insistently of our responsibilities: it particularly affects the poorest and most fragile, those who have contributed least to its evolution. It is primarily a question of justice, and then of solidarity. Climate change leads us also to base our action on responsible participation on the part of everyone: our world is now too interdependent and cannot afford to be divided into blocs of countries that promote their own interests in an isolated or unsustainable manner. “The wounds inflicted on our human family by the Covid-19 pandemic and the phenomenon of climate change are comparable to those resulting from a global conflict”,^[3] where the real enemy is irresponsible behaviour that has repercussions on all members of our humanity, today and tomorrow. A few years ago some fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto came to see me; in one year they managed to remove twelve tonnes of plastic from the sea!

“Today, as in the aftermath of the Second World War, the international community as a whole needs to set as a priority the implementation of collegial, solidary and farsighted actions”, acknowledging “the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face” (*Laudato si'*, 15). A appealing, immense and urgent challenge, that requires a coherent and proactive dynamic. Today the McDonald's groups came to see me, the restaurateur, and they told me they had abolished plastic and now everything is made using recyclable paper, everything... In the Vatican, plastic is prohibited. And we have achieved 93 percent success, I am told, without plastic. They are steps, genuine steps, that we must continue to make. Real steps.

It is a great and demanding challenge, because it requires a change of course, a decisive change in the current model of consumption and production, too often imbued with the culture of indifference and rejection: rejection of the environment, and rejection of people.

Moreover, as indicated by many in the scientific world, the change of this model is “urgent” and can no longer be postponed. A great scientist recently said – some of you were certainly present: “Yesterday my granddaughter was born; I would not like my granddaughter to find herself in an uninhabitable world thirty years from now”. We must do something. It is urgent, it cannot be postponed. We must consolidate the “dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (*ibid.*, 14), well aware that “living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect” (*ibid.*, 217) of our life experience.

It is, then, an “appealing” challenge, stimulating and achievable: to pass from the throwaway culture to lifestyles imprinted by the culture of respect and care, care for creation and care for our neighbour, near or far in space and time. We find ourselves embarking on an educational journey for a transformation of our society, a conversion both individual and communitarian (cf. *ibid.*, 219).

There is no shortage of opportunities and initiatives that aim to take this challenge seriously. I greet here the representatives of some cities from various continents, who make me think of how this challenge should be faced, in a subsidiary manner, at all levels: from small daily choices to local policies, to international ones. Again, the importance of responsible cooperation at every level must be recalled. We need everyone's contribution. And this is costly. I remember that those fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto told me: “For us at the beginning the choice was a bit difficult, because gathering plastic instead of fish did not earn us anything”. But there was something: love for creation was greater. Here is the plastic, and the fish... And so they kept going. But it costs!

It is necessary to speed up this change of course in favour of a *culture of care* – as we care for children – that places human dignity and the common good at the centre. And may it be nurtured by “that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and

towards whom we are journeying”.^[4]

“Let us not rob the new generations of their hope in a better future”.^[5] Thank you for everything you do.

[1] Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009), 19.

[2] Cf. IPCC, *Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, C. 1., p. 24.

[3] *Message to the President of COP26*, 29 October 2021.

[4] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 50.

[5] *Video Message to the Climate Ambition Summit*, 12 December 2020.
