



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** San Damaso courtyard

Wednesday, 2 September 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Catechesis: “Healing the world” - 5. Solidarity and the virtue of faith

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

After many months, we meet each other again face to face, not screen to screen. Face to face. This is good! The current pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all connected to each other, for better or for worse. Therefore, to emerge from this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone. Together. Not alone, because it cannot be done. Either it is done together, or it is not done. We must do it together, all of us, in *solidarity*. I would like to underline this word today: *solidarity*.

As a human family we have our common origin in God; we live in a common home, the garden-planet, the earth where God placed us; and we have a common destination in Christ. But when we forget all this, our *interdependence* becomes *dependence* of some on others — we lose this harmony of interdependence and solidarity — increasing inequality and marginalization; the social fabric is weakened and the environment deteriorates. The same way of acting.

Therefore, the *principle of solidarity* is now more necessary than ever, as Saint John Paul ii taught (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38-40). In an interconnected world, we experience what it means to live in the same “global village”; this expression is beautiful. The big wide world is none other than a global village, because everything is interconnected, but we do not always transform this *interdependence* into *solidarity*. There is a long journey between interdependence and solidarity. The selfishness — of individuals, nations and of groups with power — and ideological rigidities instead sustain “structures of sin” (*ibid.*, 36).

“The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity”. Much more! “It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation

of goods by a few” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 188). This is what “solidarity” means. It is not merely a question of helping others — it is good to do so, but it is more than that — it is a matter of justice (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1938-1949). Interdependence, to be in solidarity and to bear fruit, needs strong roots in humanity and in nature, created by God; it needs respect for faces and for the land.

The Bible, from the very beginning, warns us [of this]. Let us think of the account of the Tower of Babel (cf. *Gen 11:1-9*), which describes what happens when we try to reach heaven — our destination — ignoring our bond with humanity, with creation and with the Creator. It is a figure of speech. This happens every time that someone wants to climb up and up, without taking others into consideration. Just myself. Let us think about the tower. We build towers and skyscrapers, but we destroy community. We unify buildings and languages, but we mortify cultural wealth. We want to be masters of the Earth, but we ruin biodiversity and ecological balance. In another audience I told you about those fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto, who came this year, and said: “We have taken 24 tonnes of waste out of the sea, half of which was plastic”. Just think! These people have the spirit to catch fish, yes, but also the refuse, and to take it out of the water to clean up the sea. But this [pollution] is ruining the earth — not having solidarity with the earth, which is a gift — and the ecological balance.

I remember a medieval account that describes this “Babel syndrome”, which occurs when there is no solidarity. This medieval account says that, during the building of the tower, when a man fell — they were slaves — and died, no one said anything, or at best, “Poor thing, he made a mistake and he fell”. Instead, if a brick fell, everyone complained. And if someone was to blame, he was punished. Why? Because a brick was costly to make, to prepare, to fire.... It took time and work to produce a brick. A brick was worth more than a human life. Let us each, think about what happens today. Unfortunately, something like this can happen nowadays too. When shares fall in the financial markets — we have seen it in the newspapers in these days — all the agencies report the news. Thousands of people fall due to hunger and poverty and no one talks about it.

Pentecost is diametrically opposite to Babel (cf. *Acts 2:1-3*), as we heard at the beginning of the audience. The Holy Spirit, descending from above like wind and fire, sweeps over the community closed up in the Cenacle, infuses it with the power of God, and inspires it to go out and announce the Lord Jesus to everyone. The Spirit creates unity in diversity; he creates harmony. In the account of the Tower of Babel, there was no harmony; only pressing forward in order to earn. There, people were simply instruments, mere “manpower”, but here, in Pentecost, each one of us is an instrument, but a community instrument that participates fully in building up the community. Saint Francis of Assisi knew this well, and inspired by the Spirit, he gave all people, or rather, creatures, the name of brother or sister (cf. *LS*, 11; cf. Saint Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, VIII, 6: ff 1145). Even brother wolf, remember.

With Pentecost, God makes himself present and inspires the *faith* of the community *united in*

diversity and in solidarity. Diversity and solidarity united in harmony, this is the way. A diversity in solidarity possesses “antibodies” that ensure that the singularity of each person — which is a gift, unique and unrepeatable — does not become sick with individualism, with selfishness. Diversity in solidarity also possesses antibodies that heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice, systems of oppression (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 192). Therefore, solidarity today is the road to take towards a post-pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social ills. There is no other way. Either we go forward on the path of solidarity, or things will worsen. I want to repeat this: one does not emerge from a crisis the same as before. The pandemic is a crisis. We emerge from a crisis either better or worse than before. It is up to us to choose. And solidarity is, indeed, a way of coming out of the crisis better, not with superficial changes, with a fresh coat of paint so everything looks fine. No. Better!

In the midst of crises, a *solidarity* guided by *faith* enables us to translate the love of God in our globalized culture, not by building towers or walls — and how many walls are being built today! — that divide, but then collapse, but by interweaving communities and sustaining processes of growth that are truly human and solid. And to do this, solidarity helps. I would like to ask a question: do I think of the needs of others? Everyone, answer in your heart.

In the midst of crises and tempests, the Lord calls to us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked. May the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity. Thank you.

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. My thoughts turn especially to young people returning to school in the coming weeks. Upon all of you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

APPEAL FOR LEBANON

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One month after the tragedy that struck the city of Beirut, my thoughts turn once again to Lebanon and its people, so sorely tried. The priest beside me has brought the Lebanese flag to this Audience.

Today, I would repeat the words spoken by Saint John Paul ii thirty years ago, at a crucial moment in Lebanon’s history: “Faced with repeated tragedies which each of the land’s inhabitants knows, we are aware of the extreme danger that threatens the very existence of the country: Lebanon

cannot be abandoned in its solitude” (*Apostolic Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the situation in Lebanon*, 7 September 1989).

For over a hundred years, Lebanon has been a country of hope. Even in the darkest periods of its history, the Lebanese people maintained their faith in God and proved capable of making their land a place of tolerance, respect and coexistence unique in that region. How true it is that Lebanon is more than a State: it is “a message of freedom and an example of pluralism, both for the East and for the West” (*ibid.*). For the good of the country and the world, we cannot let this legacy be lost.

I encourage all Lebanese to persevere in hope and to summon the strength and energy needed to start anew. I ask political and religious leaders to commit themselves with sincerity and openness to the work of rebuilding, setting aside all partisan interests and looking to the common good and the future of the nation. Once again, I ask the international community to support Lebanon and to help it emerge from this grave crisis, without becoming caught up in regional tensions.

In a special way, my thoughts turn to the people of Beirut, who have suffered so greatly from the explosion. Brothers and sisters, take courage once more! Let faith and prayer be your strength. Do not abandon your homes and your heritage. Do not abandon the dreams of those who believed in the dawn of a beautiful and prosperous country.

Dear bishops, priests, consecrated and lay persons, continue to accompany the faithful. Of you, bishops and priests, I ask apostolic zeal, poverty and austerity. Be poor together with your poor and suffering people. Be the first to give an example of poverty and humility. Help the faithful and your people to rise again and contribute actively to a new rebirth. May all alike foster concord and renewal in the name of the common good and a genuine culture of encounter, peaceful coexistence and fraternity. Fraternity: a word so dear to Saint Francis. May this concord be a source of renewal in the common interest. This will prove a sure basis for the continuity of the Christian presence and your own inestimable contribution to the country, the Arab world and the whole region, in a spirit of fraternity among all the religious traditions present in Lebanon.

For this reason, I would ask everyone to join in a universal day of prayer and fasting for Lebanon on Friday next, 4 September. I intend to send my own representative to Lebanon that day to be present with its people: The Secretary of State will go in my name to express my spiritual closeness and solidarity. Let us pray for Lebanon as a whole and for Beirut. And let us demonstrate our closeness by concrete works of charity, as on other similar occasions. I also invite our brothers and sisters of other religious confessions to join in this initiative in whatever way they deem best, but together as one.

And now I ask you to entrust to Mary, Our Lady of Harissa, our hopes and our fears. May she sustain all who grieve for their loved ones and instil courage in those who have lost their homes

and, with them, a part of their lives! May she intercede with the Lord Jesus so that the Land of Cedars may flourish once again and spread the fragrance of fraternal coexistence throughout the entire Middle East.

And now I ask everyone, to the extent it is possible, to stand and pray in silence for Lebanon.

Special greetings

I offer a special greeting to *the elderly, young people, the sick and newlyweds*. The Lord knows better than we do about the expectations and needs we carry in our hearts. Let us entrust ourselves to his Providence with full confidence, always seeking the good, even when it comes at a high cost.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing reflection on the current pandemic, we have seen how closely connected we are, dependent on one another precisely because we were created by God and share a common home. We can only emerge stronger from the present crisis if we do so together. The Church's social doctrine thus speaks of the need for the virtue of *solidarity*. Authentic solidarity is not just about offering help to others; it is a matter of justice; it requires a radical change in our thinking that looks to the good of the community, defends the right to life for all, and promotes a just sharing of the earth's goods. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel shows what happens when a society seeks to build its own way to heaven, forsaking God, losing sight of solidarity with the most vulnerable, and valuing things over relationships. This destructive "Babel syndrome" is countered by the event of Pentecost, where the gift of the Holy Spirit creates a harmonious unity in diversity for the true building up of society. May the Spirit grant us the wisdom and creativity to find those forms of solidarity needed in our post-Covid world, for the healing of interpersonal and social ills, and the growth of the human family in fraternity, justice and peace.
