



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** San Damaso courtyard

Wednesday, 23 September 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Catechesis “Healing the world”: 8. *Subsidiarity and virtue of hope*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It seems the weather is not so good, but I wish you a good morning all the same!

To emerge better from a crisis like the current one, which is a health crisis, and at the same time, a social, political and economic crisis, each one of us is called to assume responsibility for our own part, that is, to share the responsibility. We must respond not only as individual people, but also beginning from the group to which we belong, from the role we have in society, from our principles and, if we are believers, from our faith in God. Often, however, many people cannot participate in the reconstruction of the common good because they are marginalized, they are excluded or ignored; some social groups are not able to make a contribution because they are economically or socially suffocated. In some societies, many people are not free to express their own faith and their own values, their own ideas: if they express them, they are put in jail. Elsewhere, especially in the western world, many people repress their ethical or religious convictions. However, we cannot emerge from the crisis this way, or at least emerge from it better. We would emerge from it worse.

So that we might be able to participate in the healing and regeneration of our peoples, it is only right that everyone should have the adequate resources to do so (cf. [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#) [CSDC], 186). After the great economic depression of 1929, [Pope Pius XI](#) explained how important the *principle of subsidiarity* was (cf. Encyclical [*Quadragesimo anno*](#), 79-80). This principle has a double movement: from top to bottom and from bottom to top. Perhaps we do not understand what this means, but it is a social principle that makes us more united. I will try to explain it.

On the one hand, and above all in moments of change, when single individuals, families, small

associations and local communities are not capable of achieving primary objectives, it is right that the highest levels of society, such as the State, should intervene to provide the resources necessary to progress. For example, because of the coronavirus lockdown, many people, families and economic entities found themselves and still find themselves in serious difficulty. Thus, public institutions are trying to help through appropriate social, economic, health interventions: this is their function, what they need to do.

On the other hand, however, society's leaders must respect and promote the intermediate or lower levels. In fact, the contribution of individuals, of families, of associations, of businesses, of every intermediary body, and even of the Church, is decisive. With their own cultural, religious, economic resources, or civil participation, they revitalize and reinforce society (cf. [CSCD](#), 185). That is, there is a collaboration from the top to the bottom, from the central State to the people, and from the bottom to the top: from the institutions of people to the top. And this is precisely how the principle of subsidiarity is exercised.

Everyone needs to have the possibility of assuming their own responsibility in the healing processes of the society of which they are a part. When a project is launched that directly or indirectly touches certain social groups, these groups cannot be left out from participating — for example: “What do you do?” — “I go to work with the poor,” — “Beautiful. And what do you do?” — “I teach the poor, I tell the poor what they have to do”. No, this doesn't work. The first step is to allow the poor to tell you how they live, what they need: Let everyone speak! And this is how the principle of subsidiarity works. We cannot leave the people out of participation; their wisdom, the wisdom of the humbler groups cannot be set aside (cf. Apostolic Exhortation [Querida Amazonia](#) [QA], 32; Encyclical [Laudato Si'](#), 63). Unfortunately, this injustice often happens in those places where there is a concentration of huge economic and geopolitical interests, such as, for example, certain extractive activities in some areas of the planet (cf. [QA](#), 9.14). The voices of the indigenous peoples, their culture and world view are not taken into consideration.

Today, this lack of respect of the *principle of subsidiarity* has spread like a virus. Let us think of the great financial assistance measures enacted by States. The largest financial companies are listened to more than the people or the ones who really move the economy. Multinational companies are listened to more than social movements. Putting it in everyday language, the powerful are listened to more than the weak, and this is not the way, it is not the human way, it is not the way that Jesus taught us, it is not implementing the principle of subsidiarity. In this way, we do not permit people to be “agents in their own redemption” ([Message for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2020](#), 13 May 2020). There is this motto in the collective unconscious of some politicians or some trade unionists: everything for the people, nothing with the people. From top to bottom, but without listening to the wisdom of the people, without activating this wisdom in resolving problems, in this case in emerging from the crisis. Or let us also think about the way to cure the virus: large pharmaceutical companies are listened to more than the healthcare workers employed on the front lines in hospitals or in refugee camps. This is not a good path. Everyone

should be listened to, those who are at the top and those who are at the bottom, everyone.

To emerge better from a crisis, the *principle of subsidiarity* must be implemented, respecting everyone's autonomy and capacity to take initiative, especially that of the least. All the parts of a body are necessary, as Saint Paul says, those that may seem the weakest and least important, in reality are the most necessary (cf. 1 Cor 12:22). In light of this image, we can say that the principle of subsidiarity allows everyone to assume his or her own role in the healing and destiny of society. Implementing it, implementing the principle of subsidiarity gives *hope*, it gives *hope* in a healthier and more just future; and we build this future together, aspiring to greater things, broadening our horizons. (cf. *Discourse to Students at the Fr. Félix Varela Cultural Center*, Havana – Cuba, 20 September 2015). Either we do it together, or it will not work. Either we work together to emerge from the crisis, at all levels of society, or we will never emerge from it. To emerge from the crisis does not mean to varnish over current situations so that they might appear more just. No. To emerge from the crisis means to change, and true change is done by everyone, all the persons that form a people. All the professions, all of them. And everything together, everyone in the community. If everyone does not contribute, the result will be negative.

In a previous catechesis we saw how *solidarity* is the way out of the crisis: it unites us and allows us to find solid proposals for a healthier world. But this path of solidarity needs *subsidiarity*. Someone might say to me: “But, Father, today you are using difficult words!”. This is why I am trying to explain what it means. Showing solidarity because we are taking the path of subsidiarity. In fact, there is no true solidarity without social participation, without the contribution of intermediary bodies: families, associations, cooperatives, small businesses, and other expressions of society. Everyone needs to contribute, everyone. This type of participation helps to prevent and to correct certain negative aspects of globalization and government action, as also occurs in caring for the people affected by the pandemic. These contributions “from the bottom” should be encouraged. How beautiful it is to see the work of volunteers during the crisis. Volunteers from every part of society, volunteers who come from wealthier families and those from poorer families. But everyone, everyone together to emerge. This is solidarity and this is the principle of subsidiarity.

During the lockdown, the gesture of applauding doctors and nurses as a sign of encouragement and hope arose spontaneously. Many risked their lives and many gave their lives. Let us extend this applause to every member of the social body, to each and every one, for their precious contribution, no matter how small. “But what can that person over there do?” — “Listen to that person! Give the person space to work, consult him or her”. Let us applaud the “discarded”, those whom culture defines as “discarded”, this throw-away culture — that is, let us applaud the elderly, children, persons with disability; let us applaud workers, all those who dedicate themselves to service; everyone collaborating to emerge from the crisis. But let us not stop only at applause. *Hope* is audacious, and so, let us encourage one another to dream big. Brothers and sisters, let us learn to dream big! Let us not be afraid to dream big, seeking the ideals of justice and social love

that are born of hope. Let us not try to rebuild the past — the past is the past. New things await us. The Lord promised: “I will make all things new”. Let us encourage ourselves to dream big, seeking these ideals, let us not try to rebuild the past, especially the past that was unjust and already ill which I already mentioned as injustice.... Let us build a future where the local and global dimensions mutually enrich each other — everyone can contribute, everyone has to contribute their share, their culture, their philosophy, their way of thinking — where beauty and the wealth of smaller groups, even those that are discarded, might flourish — because beauty is there too — and where those who have more dedicate themselves to service and give more to those who have less.

Special greetings

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. As summer draws to a close, I hope that these days of rest will bring peace and serenity to all. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly my thoughts turn as usual to *the elderly, young people, the sick and newlyweds*. May the witness of faith and charity that animated Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, whose memory we celebrate today, be for each of you an invitation to trust always in God’s kindness, confidently approaching the Sacrament of Reconciliation, of which the Saint from Gargano, tireless dispenser of divine mercy, was an assiduous and faithful minister.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing catecheses on the effects of the current pandemic in the light of the Church’s social doctrine, we have reflected on the need for *solidarity* with all our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, the vulnerable and the excluded. As individuals, as communities and as men and women of faith, we are called to work together in bringing healing and hope to our world. Solidarity, for its part, implies respect for the principle of *subsidiarity*, whereby every level of society, from the state to every intermediate and lesser group, including families and the Church, has a proper role to play in revitalizing the social fabric. As Saint Paul teaches, all the members of the body, even those apparently most insignificant, are essential to the good functioning of the whole. The lockdown has made us appreciate the quiet efforts of so many individuals and groups to serve the larger community. As we look to the future, may the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity guide our efforts to emerge from the crisis by working for a social order ever more just and respectful of the dignity and gifts of each of its members.

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