



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE MEETING OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND
ECOLOGY SECRETARIAT OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 7 November 2019*

[Multimedia]

Good morning, and welcome,

As we are all aware, since its foundation, the Society of Jesus has been called to the service of the poor, a vocation that Saint Ignatius included in the *Formula* of 1550. The Jesuits were to dedicate themselves to “the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of the faith”, and to “reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those in prisons or hospitals, and indeed to perform ... any other works of charity” (*Formula of the Institute*, 21 June 1550, approved and confirmed by Pope Julius iii). The *Formula* was not a declaration of intent, but rather a confirmation of a lifestyle the Jesuits had already experienced, and this filled them with consolation for they felt they had been sent by the Lord.

This original Ignatian tradition has come down to our day. Father Arrupe proposed to strengthen it, for at the basis of his vocation was the experience of contact with human pain. Years later he wrote: “I have seen (God) so close to those who suffer, to those who cry, to those who are shipwrecked in this life of abandonment, that there has been a burning desire in me to imitate him in this voluntary proximity to the derelict of the world, whom society despises” (*Este Japón increíble. Memoria del P. Arrupe*, 4th edition Mensajero, Bilbao, 1991, p. 19).

Today, we use the word discarded, do we not? We are talking about a throwaway culture, this great majority of people left behind. For me, what strikes me deeply about this text is where it originated, where it comes from. From prayer, am I not correct? Arrupe was a man of prayer, a man who wrestled with God every day, and from hence comes this strength.

Father Pedro always believed that the service of faith and the promotion of justice were inseparable: they were fundamentally united. For him, all of the Society's ministries needed to respond to the challenge of proclaiming the faith and, at the same time, of promoting justice. What until then had been a task for a few Jesuits, needed to become a concern for them all.

The poor, a place of encounter with the Lord

Every year the liturgy invites us to contemplate God in the candour of an underprivileged child who came among his own people, but was not received (cf. *Jn* 1:11). According to Saint Ignatius, a handmaid — a maidservant, a person, a young woman who serves — assists the Holy Family (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, nn. 111-114). Together with her, Ignatius exhorts us to be there too. I will make “myself a poor creature and a wretch of an unworthy slave, looking at them and serving them” (*ibid*). This is neither poetry nor publicity; Ignatius felt this. And he practiced it.

This active contemplation of God, of a disregarded God, helps us to discover the beauty of every marginalized person. No service replaces “appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 199).

Amongst the poor you have found a privileged place to encounter Christ. This is a precious gift in the life of the follower of Christ: to receive the gift of encountering him among the victims and the poor.

The encounter with Christ among his beloved ones refines our faith. This is the case with the Society of Jesus, whose experience with the least ones has deepened and strengthened the faith. “Our faith has become more paschal, more compassionate, more tender, more evangelical in its simplicity” (*General Congregation 34 of the Society of Jesus*, 1995, d 2, n. 1), especially in the service to the poor.

You have experienced a true personal and corporative transformation in silent contemplation of your brothers' and sisters' pain. A transformation that is a conversion, a return to look at the face on the crucifix, he who invites us every day to stay close to him and to bring him down from the cross.

Do not cease to offer such familiarity with the vulnerable. Our broken and divided world needs to build bridges so that the human encounter allows each of us to discover in the least ones the beautiful face of our brother, in whom we recognize ourselves, and whose presence, in its poverty, though without words, demands our care and our solidarity.

Following Jesus among the crucified

Jesus had “nowhere to lay his head” (*Mt* 8:20), dedicated as he was to preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” and to healing “every disease and every infirmity” (*Mt* 4:23). Today, his Spirit, alive amongst us, impels us to follow him in the service of the crucified people of our time.

At present there is an abundance of injustice and situations of human pain with which we are all too familiar. “Perhaps one can speak of a third war, one fought ‘piecemeal’, with crimes, massacres, destruction...” (*Homily, Redipuglia, 13 September 2014*). Human trafficking exists; instances of xenophobia and the selfish search for national interests abound; inequality between countries, and increasingly so within them, and all without a remedy. And I would say growing exponentially.

On the other hand, “never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, n. 53). It is not surprising that once again “the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet” (*ibid.*, n. 48).

To follow Jesus in these circumstances involves a set of tasks. It begins with accompanying the victims, to contemplate in them the face of our crucified Lord, and continues in being attentive to the human needs that arise, many times innumerable and unattainable in their entirety. Today, it is also necessary to reflect on the reality of the world, to unmask its evils, to discover the best responses, to generate the apostolic creativity and depth that Father Nicolás so desired for the Society.

But our response cannot stop there. We need a true “cultural revolution” (*ibid.*, n. 114), a transformation of our collective gaze, of our attitudes, of our ways of perceiving ourselves and of placing ourselves before the world. Finally, social ills often become embedded in the structures of a society, with a potential for disintegration and death (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 59). Hence, the importance of the gradual work of transforming structures, through participation in public dialogue, where decisions are made that condition the lives of the lowly (cf. *Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9 July 2015*).

Some of you, and many of the Jesuits who preceded you, have begun works of service to the poorest, educational projects, attention to refugees, the defence of human rights and social services in many fields. Continue with this creative commitment, which is always in need of renewal in a society of accelerated change. Help the Church in the discernment which we must undertake today, also concerning our apostolates. Do not cease to network among yourselves and with other ecclesial and civil organizations in order to speak out in defense of the most needy in this increasingly globalized world. With this globalization that is lopsided, that erases cultural identities, religious identities, personal identities, everything is the same. True globalization must be multifaceted. Uniting us but each one maintaining his or her uniqueness.

In the pain of our brothers and sisters and of our common home under threat, it is necessary to contemplate the mystery of the crucifix in order to be able to give one's life to the end, as many Jesuit companions have done since 1975. This year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Jesuits of the Central American University of El Salvador, which caused so much pain to Father Kolvenbach and which led him to seek the help of Jesuits throughout the Society. Many responded generously. The life and death of the martyrs is an encouragement to our service to the least ones.

And opening paths to hope

Our world needs transformations that protect life under threat and defend the weakest. We seek changes and many times we do not know what they should be, or we do not feel able to deal with them; they are beyond us.

At the borders of exclusion we run the risk of despair if we follow human logic alone. It is surprising that so often the victims of this world do not allow themselves to be overcome by the temptation to give in; rather, they trust and cling to hope.

We are all witnesses to the fact that “the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged” can and do achieve a lot... When the poor organize themselves they become genuine “social poets: creators of work, builders of housing, producers of food, above all for people left behind by the world market” (*Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9 July 2015*).

Does the social apostolate exist to solve problems? Yes, but above all to promote processes and to encourage hope. Processes that help people and communities to grow, that lead to awareness of their rights, to deploy their skills and to create their own future.

May you work for “true Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, [and which] always generates history” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 181). Share your hope wherever you are, to encourage, console, comfort and revive. Please open the future, or, to use the expression of a current scholar, frequent the future. Open the future, inspire possibilities, generate alternatives, help to think and act differently. Take care of your daily relationship with the risen and glorious Christ, and be workers of charity and sowers of hope. May you walk, singing and weeping, so that the struggles and concerns for the lives of the least and for threatened creation may not take away from you the joy of hope (cf. *Laudato Si'*, n. 244).

I would like to conclude with an image — we priests in the parishes distribute holy cards, so that people can take an image home, an image of our family. Father Arrupe's testament, there in Thailand, in the refugee camp, with the discarded, with all that man had sympathy for, to suffer with those people, with those Jesuits who, at that moment, were opening an open in this whole apostolate, asks of you one thing: do not neglect prayer. That was his testament. He left Thailand

that day and had a stroke during the flight. May this holy card, this image, always accompany you. Thank you.