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The Pope to the participants in the meeting “Narcotics: problems and solutions of this global issue”: prevention is the best way, but rehabilitation of victims is fundamental

This morning in the Casina Pio IV Pope Francis received the participants in the meeting organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, entitled “Narcotics: problems and solutions of this global issue”.

“Drug abuse is a scourge in our society, which traps many people in its nets”, said the Holy Father in his address. “They are victims who have lost their freedom in exchange for this slavery, the slavery of a dependency that we might define as chemical. It is certainly a new form of slavery, like many others that plague man today, and society in general”.

“It is clear that there is no single cause that leads to drug dependency, but rather there are many factors that intervene, including the absence of family, social pressure, propaganda by traffickers, the desire for new experiences, and so on. Each dependent person has his or her own distinct story, and must be listened to, understood and loved, and as far as possible, healed and purified. We cannot give in to the injustice of classifying drug addicts as objects or broken. Every person must be valued and appreciated in his or her dignity, so as to be cured. The dignity of the person is what we have come to find. They continue to have, more than ever, dignity as people and children of God”.

“It is not surprising that so many people fall prey to drug dependency, because worldliness offers us a wide range of possibilities for achieving ephemeral happiness, which eventually becomes poison, which corrodes, corrupts and kills. The person is destroyed, along with all those around him. The initial desire for escape, seeking momentary happiness, becomes the devastation of the person as a whole, with repercussions at all social levels”.

“In this respect, it is important to understand the scope of the drug problem, which is essentially destructive, and above all, the vastness of its production centres and distribution centres. The networks that enable the death of a person. Not only the physical death, but the psychological death, the social death. The rejection of a person. Immense and powerful networks, that entrap responsible people in society, in government, in the family. We know that the system of distribution, rather than production, constitutes an important part of organised crime, but the challenge is to identify how to control the circuits of corruption and money laundering in its various forms. To

do this, the only way is to trace the chain that leads from the small-scale drug trade to the most sophisticated forms of laundering, nesting in the financial capital and banks that are dedicated to the laundering of dirty money”.

“A judge in my country started working seriously on this. He had several thousand kilometres of border in his jurisdiction, and he worked seriously on the problem of drugs. Soon after he received a photo of his family in the post: ‘Your son goes to this school, your wife does this...’, nothing more. A mafia warning. Or rather, when one starts to look to where the networks of distribution lead, one finds this five-letter word: mafia. Because, just as distribution kills those who are enslaved by drugs in consumption, those who wish to destroy this slavery are also killed”.

“It is certain that in order to curb the demand for drugs, it is necessary to make great efforts and to implement extensive social programmes oriented towards health, family support and, above all, education, which I consider fundamental. Holistic human formation is the priority; it offers people the possibility of tools for discernment, enabling them to discard some options and help others. Training is mainly to be aimed at the vulnerable, such as children and young people, but it is also valuable to extend it to families and to those who suffer some form of marginalisation. However, the problem of prevention of drug abuse as a programme is obstructed by a thousand and one factors linked to the ineptitude of governments; the sectors of government here and there. And successful programmes for drug abuse prevention are almost non-existent. Once it advances, it takes root in society and it is very difficult. I think of my own country: thirty years ago it was a country of transit, then consumption and even production. In thirty years. This is the progress that is made thanks to mafia involvement”.

The Pope emphasised that while prevention is a priority, “it is also fundamental to work for the full rehabilitation of victims in society, to restore their joy and to help them regain the dignity they have lost. Until this is guaranteed, also by the state and by legislative means, recovery will be difficult and victims risk becoming victims once again”.

The neediest of our brothers, who apparently have nothing to give, bear a treasure for us, the face of God, Who speaks to us and calls to us”, the Pope concluded, encouraging the participants at the meeting to continue with their work and to implement, as far as possible, “the welcome initiatives undertaken in the service of those who suffer the most on this battlefield. The struggle is hard, and whenever one commits oneself and starts to work, he runs the risk of the judge in my country who received menacing letters. But we are defending the human family, defending the young, children. As we say, defending the nest we defend the future. It is not a question of momentary discipline, but of looking ahead to the future. Many thanks for what you do”.
