SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place at 9.30 in the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

The Holy Father delivered a special catechesis on the occasion of the fiftieth Earth Day, on the fifth anniversary of his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, on the care of the common home (*Gen* 2: 8-9, 15).

After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Pope addressed special greetings to thevì faithful.

The general audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we celebrate the fiftieth Earth Day. This is an occasion for renewing our commitment to love and care for our common home and for the weaker members of our human family. As the tragic coronavirus pandemic has taught us, we can overcome global challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst. The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* deals precisely with this "Care for our Common Home". Today, let us reflect together a little on that responsibility which characterises "our earthly sojourn" (*Laudato Si'*, 160). We must grow in our awareness of care for our common home.

We are fashioned from the *earth*, and fruit of the earth sustains our life. But, as the book of Genesis reminds us, we are not simply "*earthly*"; we also bear within us the *breath of life* that comes from God (cf. *Gen* 2:4-7). Thus we live in this common home as one human family in biodiversity with God's other creatures. As *imago Dei*, image of God, we are called to have care and respect for all creatures, and to offer love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable among us, in imitation of God's love for us, manifested in his Son Jesus, who made Himself man to share this situation with us and to save us.

Because of our selfishness we have failed in our responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth. "We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair" (ibid., 61). We have polluted and we have despoiled it, endangering our very lives. For this reason, various international and local movements have sprung up in order to appeal to our consciences. I deeply appreciate these initiatives; still it will be necessary for our children to take to the streets to teach us the obvious: we have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us.

We have failed to care for the earth, our garden-home; we have failed to care for our brothers and sisters. We have sinned against the earth, against our neighbours, and ultimately against the Creator, the benevolent Father who provides for everyone, and desires us to live in communion and flourish together. And how does the earth react? There is a Spanish saying that is very clear, in this; it says: "God forgives always; we men forgive sometimes; the earth never forgives". The earth never forgives: if we have despoiled the earth, the response will be very bad.

How can we restore a harmonious relationship with the earth and with the rest of humanity? A harmonious relationship… Very often we lose our view of harmony: harmony is the work of the Holy Spirit. In the common home, on earth, too; also in our relationship with people, with our neighbour, with the poor, how can we restore this harmony? We need a new way of looking at our common home. Let us be clear: it is not a storehouse of resources for us to exploit. For us believers, the natural world is the "Gospel of Creation": it expresses God's creative power in fashioning human life and bringing the world and all it contains into existence, in order to sustain humanity. As the biblical account of creation concludes: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (*Gen* 1:31). We we see these natural tragedies that are the earth's response to our mistreatment, I think: "If I ask the Lord now what He thinks, I don't think He will tell me something very good". We are the ones who have ruined the work of the Lord!

In today's celebration of Earth Day, we are called to renew our sense of sacred respect for the earth, for it is not just our home but also God's home. This should make us all the more aware that *we stand on holy ground*!

Dear brothers and sisters, "let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, 56). The prophetic gift of contemplation is something that we can learn especially from indigenous peoples. They teach us that we cannot heal the earth unless we love and respect it. They have that wisdom of "living well", not in the sense of having a good time, no, but of living in harmony with the earth. They call this harmony "good living".

At the same time, we need an ecological conversion that can find expression in concrete actions. As a single and interdependent family, we require a common plan in order to avert the threats to our common home. "Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan" (*Laudato Si'*, 164). We are aware of the importance of cooperation as an international community for the protection of our common home. I urge those in positions of leadership to guide the preparations for two important international Conferences: *COP15 on Biodiversity* in Kunming, China, and *COP26 on Climate Change* in Glasgow, United Kingdom. These two meetings are very important.

I would like to support concerted action also on the national and local levels. It will help if people at all levels of society come together to create a popular movement "from below". The *Earth Day* we are celebrating today was itself born in precisely this way. We can each contribute in our own small way. "We need not think that these efforts are going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread" (*Laudato Si'*, 212).

In this Easter season of renewal, let us pledge to love and esteem the beautiful gift of the *earth*, our common home, and to care for all members of our human family. Like the brothers and sisters that we are, let us together implore our heavenly Father: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth" (cf. *Ps* 104:30).

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you!