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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the Fourth World Day of Prayer for Creation

The following is the Holy Father's Message for the World Day of Prayer for Creation, today 1 September:

Message of the Holy Father

"You shall thus hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim a release throughout the land

to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you" (Lev 25:10)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Each year, particularly since the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS, 24 May 2015), the first day of September is celebrated by the Christian family as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and the beginning of the Season of Creation, which concludes on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi on the fourth of October. During this period, Christians worldwide renew their faith in the God of creation and join in prayer and work for the care of our common home.

I am very pleased that the theme chosen by the ecumenical family for the celebration of the 2020 Season of Creation is *Jubilee for the Earth*, precisely in this year that marks the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day.

In the Holy Scriptures, a Jubilee is a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore, and rejoice.

1. A Time to Remember

We are invited to remember above all that creation's ultimate destiny is to enter into God's eternal Sabbath. This journey, however, takes place in time, spanning the seven-day rhythm of the week, the cycle of seven years, and the great Jubilee Year that comes at the end of the seven Sabbath years.

A Jubilee is indeed a time of grace to remember creation's original vocation to exist and flourish as a community of love. We exist only in relationships: with God the Creator, with our brothers and sisters as members of a common family, and with all of God's creatures within our common home. "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (*LS*, 92)

A Jubilee, then, is a time of remembrance, in which we cherish the memory of our inter-relational existence. We need constantly to remember that "everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others" (*LS*, 70).

2. A Time to Return

A Jubilee is a time to turn back in repentance. We have broken the bonds of our relationship with the Creator, with our fellow human beings, and with the rest of creation. We need to heal the damaged relationships that are essential to supporting us and the entire fabric of life.

A Jubilee is a time to return to God our loving Creator. We cannot live in harmony with creation if we are not at peace with the Creator who is the source and origin of all things. As Pope Benedict observed, "the brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property" (*Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone*, 6 August 2008).

The Jubilee season calls us to think once again of our fellow human beings, especially the poor and the most vulnerable. We are asked to re-appropriate God's original and loving plan of creation as a common heritage, a banquet which all of our brothers and sisters share in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, supporting and protecting one another. A Jubilee is a time for setting free the oppressed and all those shackled in the fetters of various forms of modern slavery, including trafficking in persons and child labour.

We also need once more to listen to the land itself, which Scripture calls *adamah*, the soil from which man, *Adam*, was made. Today we hear the voice of creation admonishing us to return to our rightful place in the natural created order – to remember that we are part of this interconnected web of life, not its masters. The disintegration of biodiversity, spiralling climate disasters, and unjust impact of the current pandemic on the poor and vulnerable: all these are a wakeup call in the face of our rampant greed and consumption.

Particularly during this Season of Creation, may we be attentive to the rhythms of this created world. For the world was made to communicate the glory of God, to help us to discover in its beauty the Lord of all, and to return to him (cf. SAINT BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.*, I, 2, 2, q. 1, conclusion; *Breviloquium*, II, 5.11). The earth from which we were made is thus a place of prayer and meditation. "Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense" (*Querida Amazonia*, 56). The capacity to wonder and to contemplate is something that we can learn especially from our indigenous brothers and sisters, who live in harmony with the land and its multiple forms of life.

3. A Time to Rest

In his wisdom, God set aside the Sabbath so that the land and its inhabitants could rest and be renewed. These days, however, our way of life is pushing the planet beyond its limits. Our constant demand for growth and an endless cycle of production and consumption are exhausting the natural world. Forests are leached, topsoil erodes, fields fail, deserts advance, seas acidify and storms intensify. Creation is groaning!

During the Jubilee, God's people were invited to rest from their usual labour and to let the land heal and the earth repair itself, as individuals consumed less than usual. Today we need to find just and sustainable ways of living that can give the Earth the rest it requires, ways that satisfy everyone with a sufficiency, without destroying

the ecosystems that sustain us.

In some ways, the current pandemic has led us to rediscover simpler and sustainable lifestyles. The crisis, in a sense, has given us a chance to develop new ways of living. Already we can see how the earth can recover if we allow it to rest: the air becomes cleaner, the waters clearer, and animals have returned to many places from where they had previously disappeared. The pandemic has brought us to a crossroads. We must use this decisive moment to end our superfluous and destructive goals and activities, and to cultivate values, connections and activities that are life-giving. We must examine our habits of energy usage, consumption, transportation, and diet. We must eliminate the superfluous and destructive aspects of our economies, and nurture life-giving ways to trade, produce, and transport goods.

4. *A Time to Restore*

A Jubilee is a time to restore the original harmony of creation and to heal strained human relationships.

It invites us to re-establish equitable societal relationships, restoring their freedom and goods to all and forgiving one another's debts. We should not forget the historic exploitation of the global South that has created an enormous ecological debt, due mainly to resource plundering and excessive use of common environmental space for waste disposal. It is a time for restorative justice. In this context, I repeat my call for the cancellation of the debt of the most vulnerable countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of the medical, social and economic crises they face as a result of Covid-19. We also need to ensure that the recovery packages being developed and deployed at global, regional and national levels must be regeneration packages. Policy, legislation and investment must be focused on the common good and guarantee that global social and environmental goals are met.

We also need to restore the land. Climate restoration is of utmost importance, since we are in the midst of a climate emergency. We are running out of time, as our children and young people have reminded us. We need to do everything in our capacity to limit global average temperature rise under the threshold of 1.5°C enshrined in the Paris Climate Agreement, for going beyond that will prove catastrophic, especially for poor communities around the world. We need to stand up for intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity at this critical moment. I invite all nations to adopt more ambitious national targets to reduce emissions, in preparation for the important Climate Summit (COP 26) in Glasgow in the United Kingdom.

Biodiversity restoration is also crucially important in the context of unprecedented loss of species and degradation of ecosystems. We need to support the U.N. call to safeguard 30% of the earth as protected habitats by 2030 in order to stem the alarming rate of biodiversity loss. I urge the international community to work together to guarantee that the Summit on Biodiversity (COP 15) in Kunming, China becomes a turning point in restoring the earth to be a home of life in abundance, as willed by the Creator.

We must restore with justice in mind, ensuring that those who have lived on the land for generations can regain control over its usage. Indigenous communities must be protected from companies, particularly multinational companies, that "operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home" (LS, 51), through the destructive extraction of fossil fuels, minerals, timber and agroindustrial products. This corporate misconduct is a "new version of colonialism" (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, 27 April 2001, cited in *Querida Amazonia*, 14), one that shamefully exploits poorer countries and communities desperately seeking economic development. We need to strengthen national and international legislation to regulate the activities of extractive companies and ensure access to justice for those affected.

5. *A Time to Rejoice*

In the biblical tradition, a Jubilee was a joyous occasion, inaugurated by a trumpet blast resounding throughout the land. We are aware that the cries of the earth and of the poor have become even louder and more painful in recent years. At the same time, we also witness how the Holy Spirit is inspiring individuals and communities around the world to come together to rebuild our common home and defend the most vulnerable in our midst.

We see the gradual emergence of a great mobilisation of people from below and from the peripheries who are generously working for the protection of the land and of the poor. We rejoice to see how young people and communities, particularly indigenous communities, are on the frontlines in responding to the ecological crisis. They are calling for a Jubilee for the earth and a new beginning, aware that “things can change” (*LS*, 13).

We also rejoice to see how the *Laudato Si'* Special Anniversary Year is inspiring many initiatives at local and global levels for the care of our common home and the poor. This year should lead to long-term action plans to practise integral ecology in our families, parishes and dioceses, religious orders, our schools and universities, our healthcare, business and agricultural institutions, and many others as well.

We rejoice too that faith communities are coming together to create a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. We are particularly happy that the Season of Creation is becoming a truly ecumenical initiative. Let us continue to grow in the awareness that we all live in a common home as members of a single family.

Let us all rejoice that our loving Creator sustains our humble efforts to care for the earth, which is also God's home where his Word “became flesh and lived among us” (*Jn* 1:14) and which is constantly being renewed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth” (cf. *Ps* 104:30).

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 1 September 2020

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