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Audience of the Holy Father Francis with members of the “Apoteca Natura” Pharmacists’ Network

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Apoteca Natura” Pharmacists’ Network, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

I thank Dr. Massimo Mercati for his words, and for the publications he sent. Thank you.

Your experience of searching nature for the answers to health problems made me think of Amazonia – not of Amazonian witchcraft, but of Amazonia. I know you can well understand this association of ideas. The indigenous peoples – in Amazonia as elsewhere in the world – are depositaries of rich patrimonies of natural therapies; but unfortunately, even these are in danger of being lost if the original cultures die out. And the indigenous cultures have this attitude, always, with Creation, with the environment, of *living well*, which is not the *dolce vita* or living the good life: no. It is harmony of the person, the family, the people, living with Creation.

I see in your work a positive sign of the times: a creative way of doing business and generating employment starting from an integrally ecological intuition, an intuition that responds to the overriding need today to rediscover a new harmony – the word: *new harmony* – between us human beings, and creation.

And in the network of your pharmacies, I see another happy intuition: the attempt to develop what is already in itself a characteristic of pharmacists, that is, a personalized relationship with the people of the area, a certain capacity for listening in order to be able to advise and to guide... However, while this is not your invention, you propose to “invest” in this aspect, which is very important from the point of view of basic health care. Unfortunately, for various reasons, the figure of the family doctor has almost disappeared, and the risk is that, in order to privilege “excellence”, the good quality of territorial health services is neglected; or that these are so bureaucratized and computerized that the elderly or poorly educated find themselves effectively excluded or

marginalized. Of course, pharmacies cannot replace what is the responsibility of the national health service, but they can certainly meet a real need of the people by compensating for certain shortcomings.

Let us return to what seems to me to be the original intuition of your activity. It can be summarized in two words: *harmony* and *care*.

Harmony is a concept that is very close to my heart, but it also has a high theological and spiritual value; indeed, it may be considered the name of God, because the Holy Spirit himself is harmony. Therefore, creation, inasmuch as it is “created” by God who is harmony, reflects the plan of the Creator and, while being intimately marked by the evil that has contaminated it, it always aspires to goodness and harmony. Saint Paul, writing to the Romans, touches on this reality, saying that “creation was made subject to futility”, and “is groaning in labour pains even until now” (*Rm* 8:20,22). In the multiform phenomenon of the cosmos, and in particular, of life in all its expressions, we can recognize a plan. Paul even speaks of the “eager expectation” of creation (*Rm* 8:19), almost as if the hope of God – the hope of salvation and communion – were reflected on creation and in his creation.

Today, in a world that is globalized and interconnected, the clash between two cultures appears even more evident: the culture of consumerism and waste – it is a culture; the two go together, the culture of consumerism and of waste – which is a form of nihilism – and then the *culture of care*, on the other hand. And we must choose: there is no other way of going forward! Today we are not permitted to remain neutral. A choice is imposed, because the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor demand responsibility. To respond. The culture of consumerism and waste is very pervasive and conditions much of our daily behaviour, and so too the culture of care expresses itself in many choices, small and large, which everyone is called upon to make, depending on the role they occupy. The Encyclical *Laudato si'* was intended to be, for the whole Church, and for all men and women of good will, an appeal to take on an attitude of *care* with awareness and decision. And, as I know you, I think I can say that your work responds to this logic and this way of life: entering into the culture of care.

Every person, in his or her own role, can contribute to spreading the culture of care. Thank you for what you do, starting from your field of work, seeking also to make a tangible contribution to enabling the growth of a different economy, an economy centred on the person and on the common good. I bless all of you and your families from my heart. And please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you!
