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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the symposium organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Evangelii Gaudium*

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to participants in the symposium organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for organizing this symposium to reflect on *Evangelii Gaudium* ten years after its publication.

On that occasion, I addressed Christians to invite them to a new phase in the proclamation of the Gospel. I proposed rediscovering the missionary joy of the first Christians, *filled with joy, unflagging courage and zeal in proclaiming the Gospel*,¹ even in circumstances that were *not conducive to the Gospel message, the struggle for justice, or the defence of human dignity*.² They were defamed, persecuted, tortured, killed .. and yet, instead of shutting themselves away, they were the paradigm of an outgoing Church, that knew how to *boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast*.³

Difficulties also exist in our time; less explicit but at perhaps more insidious. As they are less visible, they operate like an anaesthetic or like the carbon monoxide from old cookers that kills silently. *Every period of history is marked by the presence of human weakness, self-absorption, complacency and selfishness, to say nothing of the concupiscence which preys upon us. These things are ever present under one guise or another*.⁴

The proclamation of the Gospel in today's world continues to demand of us *a prophetic, counter-cultural*

resistance to the self-centred hedonism of paganism,⁵ like that of the Fathers of the Church, resistance before a system that kills, excludes, destroys human dignity; resistance before a mentality that isolates, alienates, closes the inner life in its own interests, distances us from our neighbour, distances us from God.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* I wanted to show clearly that, called to have the same sentiments as Jesus Christ, our evangelizing mission and our Christian life cannot ignore the poor. *The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor.*⁶ All of it. From his own mother, the Holy Virgin, a poor girl on the outskirts of a great empire. Jesus Himself who made Himself poor, who was born in a stable among animals and peasants, who grew up among workers and earned His bread with His hands, who surrounded Himself with crowds of the dispossessed, identified with them, put them at the centre of His heart, announced the Good News to them first, who promised them the Kingdom of Heaven and sent us all, missionary disciples, to feed them, to distribute goods justly with them, to defend their cause to the point of clearly indicating to us that *mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven* (cf. Mt 25:35ff) ⁷

*This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it,*⁸ because our salvation is at stake here. That is why the Pope cannot fail to put the poor at the centre. It is not politics, it is not sociology, it is not ideology, it is purely and simply the requirement of the Gospel. The practical implications of this non-negotiable principle for each context, society, person and institution – in international organizations and governments, in trade unions and popular movements, in companies and financial institutions, in politicians, judges and the media – can and must vary, but what no one can evade or excuse themselves from is the debt of love that every Christian – and I dare say, every human being – owes to the poor.

The Church can find in the poor the wind that fans the flame of a waning fervour, like that thick liquid with which the ancient priests of Nehemiah's time rekindled the fire of the altar after the exile so that there was "a fire so great that all were astonished"[9]. In the active love we owe to the poor there is the remedy for *the great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism ... the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.*¹⁰

In *u*, without laying claim to a monopoly on the interpretation of social reality, I argued that in order to radically solve the problems of the poor, a necessary condition for solving any other problem since inequality is at the root of social ills, we needed a profound change of mentalities and structures. I would like to refer briefly to these two aspects by taking some paragraphs from the Exhortation.

A new mindset

*A new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of good by a few.*¹¹

*Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.*¹²

Sometimes it is a matter of hearing the cry of entire peoples, the poorest peoples of the earth, since 'peace is founded not only on respect for human rights, but also on respect for the rights of peoples' [154]. Sadly, even human rights can be used as a justification for an inordinate defense of individual rights or the rights of richer peoples. With due respect for the autonomy and culture of every nation, we must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind; the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity. It must be

reiterated that 'the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others' [155]. To speak properly of our own rights, we need to broaden our perspective and to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country. We need to grow in solidarity which 'would allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny', [156] since 'every person is called to self-fulfilment' [157].

New structures of solidarity

The new structures, founded on this new mindset, must *[reject] the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and [attack] the structural causes of inequality.*¹⁴

*The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development. How many words prove irksome to this system! It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labour and defending the dignity of the powerless, when allusion is made to a God who demands a commitment to justice. Casual indifference in the face of such questions empties our lives and our words of all meaning. Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all.*¹⁵

*We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market. Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programmes, mechanism and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. I am far from proposing an irresponsible populism, but the economy can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded.*¹⁶

If we do not achieve this change of mindset and structures, we are condemned to see the deepening of the climate, health and migration crises, and particularly violence and wars, putting at risk the whole human family, poor and non-poor, integrated and excluded, because "we are all in the same boat and we are all called to row together".

In *Evangelii Gaudium* I intended to show:

*Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of a hope for a better future. We are far from the so-called "end of history", since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized.*¹⁷

Today's economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence

which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. It serves only to offer false hopes to those clamouring for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence, rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts. Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalizations, they claim that the solution is an “education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes even more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries – in their governments, businesses and institutions – whatever the political ideology of their leaders.¹⁸

In the same way, the climate, healthcare and migratory crises have the same root in the inequity of this economy that kills, discards and destroys sister mother earth, in the selfish mentality that sustains it, to which I referred in greater depth in *Laudato sí*. Those who think they can save themselves alone, in this world or in the next, are mistaken.

Ten years on from the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium*, let us reaffirm that only by listening to the often-silenced cry of the earth and of the poor can we fulfil our evangelizing mission, live the life that Jesus proposes to us and contribute to solving the grave problems of humanity.

I thank you again for this Symposium;

Thank you for what you do. I bless you and accompany you with prayer. And please do not forget to pray for me.

Vatican City, 24 November 2023

FRANCIS

[1] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 263

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid, 24

[4] Ibid, 263

[5] Ibid, 193

[6] Ibid, 197

[7] Ibid, 197

[8] Ibid, 194

[9] 2 Mac, 1, 22

[10] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 2

[11] Ibid, 188

[12] Ibid, 189

[13] Ibid, 190

[14] Ibid, 202

[15] Ibid, 203

[16] Ibid, 204

[17] Ibid, 59

[18] ibid, 60
