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Press Conference to present the Message for Lent 2019

At 11.30 this morning, in the John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Holy Father Francis' Message for Lent 2019, entitled "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (*Rom* 8: 19).

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Msgr. Segundo Tejado Muñoz, under-secretary of the same Dicastery; and Dr. Alberto Piatti, executive vice-president for Responsible and Sustainable Enterprise, Eni.

The following is the intervention by Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson:

Intervention of Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

In the social doctrine of the Church the classic expression of "authentic and integral development" is rooted in an anthropological relationship as well as in an interconnection with all things. The human person, therefore, is not the self-referential centre of creation. In the distinctive nature of his creation in the image and semblance of God, and in his being in the spirit of God, the human being is an interconnected and interdependent part of the world thus created. Giving names and meaning to all the things that exist, as well as to the animals, and given the responsibility for Creation as a garden to cultivate and care for, the human being is considered and understood in his proper role, as the "high priest" of creation. The man and the woman represent creation, of which they are part before God; and their actions therefore drastically and radically have effects on the destiny of creation.

We see how this is represented in two pages from the Book of Genesis, which we read just two weeks ago during Mass. According to Genesis 6: 5-8, "*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created – and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground'*". Then the storm arrived and destroyed everything, and Noah

saved what he had put on the Ark.

After the flood and the sacrifice of Noah, God said again, “*Never again will I curse the ground because of humans ... and never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done*” (Gen 8: 21). In the same way, the prophet Isaiah tells us that “the earth dries up and withers ... the earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws” (Is 24: 4ss).

This is the logic that is at the base of our *Message for Lent* this year! The redemption of humanity and its liberation from evil and from sin express the redemption of all creation from the curse and all the evils that it suffers due to the sin of humanity. The redemption and liberation of humanity from sin are conceived, in our Lenten Message, in terms of filial regeneration: the rebirth of humanity (Adam) as sons/daughters of God, and it is this that creation anxiously awaits (cf. Rom 8: 19).

At Easter, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the work of redemption is fulfilled and it offers itself to humanity to be made its own. And thus the yearning of creation for its liberation is expressed in two directions: in the realization of the work of redemption by Christ, and in humanity that makes its own the death and resurrection of Christ Himself. For this reason creation still awaits “with impatience the revelation of the sons of God”. In this Lenten time, as we await the celebration of the memory of the Christ’s redeeming work for us, we ourselves “who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8: 23).

The Message for Lent this year invites us to celebrate Easter as a feast of the call of man to a new generation, the realization of which, while an experience projected into the future, is nonetheless rooted in the present: in the human condition that is the superimposition. Or rather, that superimposition of the ages and times, between what has already been and what will be, between Adam and Christ, the fall and redemption.

The present of the human condition, and with this naturally all that relates to creation, is a tension between the legacy of Adam and the redemption of Christ and of His Spirit, already at work in the life of man. We know the legacy of Adam, work and the temptation of the flesh (let us remember the Letter to the Romans, 6: 19-23): “*Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*”.

Therefore we continue to be drawn into the different manifestations of the power of sin and of its consequences in our life, but Christ’s redemption offers to us all at the same time “another base for operation and work”, for our lives that tend towards sin. And it is exactly from that base that we are called to set out, to live and to act. Living the reality of Christ’s redemption, which has made us “sons of God”, opening the doors to the relationship with Christ and with His Spirit (we can cite Saint John Paul II who said, “Open wide the doors to Christ and to His divine power!”), and to mature in us the image of Christ Himself, Son of God.

May the maturation and growth of the image of Christ in us guide us to regeneration in the Glory of the sons of God, and with us also the rest of Creation. This is the setting for our Lenten commitment this year: by constantly experiencing human sin (that is, a relationship of betrayed sonship), we have at the same time the possibility of the Grace of redemption of Christ and of the gift of His Spirit, to gradually give shape to our lives and to enter into the Glory of being sons and daughters of God. As the First Letter of Peter (1: 22-23) tells us: “*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God*”.
