



The Holy See

**VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH FESTIVAL OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
[VERONA, 26-29 NOVEMBER 2015]**

Dear ones,

A warm greeting to all of you who are attending the fifth Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church. I know that this year you have chosen the theme “The challenge of reality”, referring to what I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric” (n. 231). In order to ward off the danger of living outside reality it is necessary to open our eyes and heart.

Our life is made up of many things, of an incursion of news, of many problems: all of this drives us not to see, not to notice the problems of the people who are beside us. Indifference seems to be a medicine that protects us from getting involved, becoming a way to be more at peace. This is indifference. But this non-involvement is a manner of upholding selfishness and it makes us glum. Being close to people, pouring the oil of consolation, touching the flesh of the other, taking on his problems, expands the heart, puts love back into circulation and makes us feel well. This concreteness and this closeness is the path that Jesus points to when he says: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...” (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Bending down — these are the words: bending down — to the other is the most direct way to expand the heart, to kindle love, inspire thought, and invent practical and innovative responses to problems.

The challenge of reality also calls for the capacity to dialogue, to build bridges in place of walls. This is the time to dialogue, not to defend offsetting rigidity. I invite you to face “the challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together, of mingling, of encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this tide which, although a bit chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage” (*Evangelii Gaudium*,

n. 87). Dialogue opens up to those who are different and recomposes a picture of the many segments of our society, creating the conditions for a harmonious design.

The challenge of reality, however, calls for change. Everyone perceives the need for change because we realize that something is wrong. Consumerism, the idolatry of money, too many forms of inequality and injustice, and the homogenization of prevailing thought are a burden from which we must free ourselves by recovering our dignity and committing ourselves to sharing, knowing that the solution to concrete problems comes not from money but from the fraternity which takes on the burdens of the other. True change begins first and foremost with us and is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. People interiorly changed by the Spirit also contribute to social change. Change is then required of our structures: it is preferable to be flexible in order to better respond to concrete needs, than to protect structures and remain cast in plaster. Cleaning up a bit, increasing transparency, recovering freshness, genuineness and agility is good for structures and for people: we will once again find the impulse and the enthusiasm of doing something good at the service of our brothers and sisters. New needs and new forms of poverty require new solutions. In the experience of closeness we will also find the inspiration and strength to give concrete shape to the change that everyone desires.

One last thing to emphasize: the ecological challenge. This calls for listening to the cry of mother earth: respect for creatures and for creation is a great challenge for the future of mankind. Mankind and creation are inextricably linked: today “we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, n. 49).

The theme of caring for the earth, that is to say for our common home, is very broad; someone might think that what we are able to do has no concrete effect, is not enough to generate change. The theme certainly pertains to politics, the economy, and strategic choices on development, but nothing can replace our personal commitment. Moderation, conscientious consumption, a lifestyle that accepts creation as a gift and excludes predatory forms and exclusive ownership, is the concrete way through which a new sensitivity is created. If many of us live in this manner, the whole of society will feel it in a positive way and the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor will become audible to everyone.

Dearly beloved, let us look ahead with courage! The challenges of reality are many, and we have the task and the joy of turning them into opportunities.

I renew my warm greeting to all the participants of the fifth Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church and particularly to the many volunteers who freely make themselves available. I extend a greeting to the Bishop of Verona who is hosting this event, and I thank Don Vincenzi for the service of spreading, knowing and testing the Social Doctrine of the Church. Thank you!

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