



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD MEETING OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS

*Old Synod Hall
Tuesday, 28 October 2014*

Good morning again, I am happy to be with you. Besides, let me tell you a secret: this is the first time I have come down here to the Old Synod Hall, I have never been here before. As I was saying, I am very happy to see you here, and I welcome you warmly.

I thank you – you who suffer exclusion and inequality in the first person – for accepting the invitation to discuss the many very serious social problems that afflict the world today. I also thank Cardinal Turkson for his welcome – thank you, Eminence, for your work and your words of greeting.

This meeting of grassroots movements is a sign, it is a great sign, for you have brought a reality that is often silenced into the presence of God, the Church and all peoples. The poor not only suffer injustice, they also struggle against it!

You are not satisfied with empty promises, with alibis or excuses. Nor do you wait with arms crossed for NGOs to help, for welfare schemes or paternalistic solutions that never arrive; or if they do, then it is with a tendency to anaesthetize or to domesticate ... and this is rather perilous. One senses that the poor are no longer waiting. You want to be protagonists. You get organized, study, work, issue demands and, above all, practice that very special solidarity that exists among those who suffer, among the poor, and that our civilization seems to have forgotten or would strongly prefer to forget.

Solidarity is a word that is not always well received. In certain circumstances it has become a dirty word, something one dares not say. However, it is a word that means much more than an occasional gesture of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means

that the lives of all take priority over the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means fighting against the structural causes of poverty and inequality; of the lack of work, land and housing; and of the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced dislocation, painful emigration, human trafficking, drugs, war, violence and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called upon to transform. Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history, and this is what the popular movements are doing.

This meeting of ours is not shaped by an ideology. You do not work with abstract ideas; you work with realities such as those I just mentioned and many others that you have told me about. You have your feet in the mud, you are up to your elbows in flesh-and-blood reality. You carry the smell of your neighbourhood, your people, your struggle! We want your voices to be heard – voices that are rarely heard. No doubt this is because your voices cause embarrassment, no doubt it is because your cries are bothersome, no doubt because people are afraid of the change that you seek. However, without your presence, without truly going to the fringes, the good proposals and projects we often hear about at international conferences remain stuck in the realm of ideas and wishful thinking.

The scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilize the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity or being negated; or worse still, we find hidden personal agendas or commercial interests. “Hypocrites” is what Jesus would say to those responsible. How marvellous it is, by contrast, when we see peoples moving forward, especially their young and their poorest members. Then one feels a promising breeze that revives hope for a better world. May this breeze become a cyclone of hope. This is my wish.

This meeting of ours responds to a very concrete desire, something that any father and mother would want for their children – a desire for what should be within everyone’s reach, namely *land, housing and work*. However, nowadays, it is sad to see that land, housing and work are ever more distant for the majority. It is strange but, if I talk about this, some say that the Pope is communist. They do not understand that love for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel. Land, housing and work, what you struggle for, are sacred rights. To make this claim is nothing unusual; it is the social teaching of the Church. I am going to dwell on each of these briefly since you have chosen them as the core issues for this meeting.

Land. At the beginning of creation, God created man and woman, stewards of his work, mandating them *to till and to keep* it (cf. Gn 2:15). I notice dozens of farmworkers (*campesinos*) here, and I want to congratulate you for caring for the land, for cultivating it and for doing so in community. The elimination of so many brothers and sisters *campesinos* worries me, and it is not because of wars or natural disasters that they are uprooted. Land and water grabbing, deforestation, unsuitable pesticides are some of the evils which uproot people from their native land. This

wretched separation is not only physical but existential and spiritual as well because there is a relationship with the land, such that rural communities and their special way of life are being put at flagrant risk of decline and even of extinction.

The other dimension of this already global process is hunger. When financial speculation manipulates the price of food, treating it as just another commodity, millions of people suffer and die from hunger. At the same time, tons of food are thrown away. This constitutes a genuine scandal. Hunger is criminal, food is an inalienable right. I know that some of you are calling for agrarian reform in order to solve some of these problems, and let me tell you that in some countries – and here I cite the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) – “agrarian reform is, besides a political necessity, a moral obligation.”^[1]

It is not just me saying this, it is in the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#). Please carry on your struggle for the dignity of the rural family, for water, for life, and so that everyone can benefit from the fruits of the earth.

Second, Housing. I said it and I repeat it: a home for every family. We must never forget that, because there was no room in the inn, Jesus was born in a stable; and that his family, persecuted by Herod, had to leave their home and flee into Egypt. Today there are so many homeless families, either because they have never had one or because, for different reasons, they have lost it. Family and housing go hand in hand. Furthermore, for a house to be a home, it requires a community dimension, and this is the neighbourhood ... and it is precisely in the neighbourhood where the great family of humanity begins to be built, starting from the most immediate instance, from living together with one's neighbours. We live nowadays in immense cities that show off proudly, even arrogantly, how modern they are. But while they offer wellbeing and innumerable pleasures for a happy minority, housing is denied to thousands of our neighbours, our brothers and sisters including children, who are called elegant names such as 'street people' or 'without fixed abode' or 'urban camper'. Isn't it curious how euphemisms abound in the world of injustices! A person, a segregated person, a person set apart, a person who suffers misery or hunger: such a one is 'urban camper'. It is an elegant expression, isn't it? You should be on the lookout – I might be wrong in some cases; but in general, what lurks behind each euphemism is a crime.

We live in cities that throw up skyscrapers and shopping centres and strike big real estate deals ... but they abandon a part of themselves to marginal settlements on the periphery. How painful it is to hear that poor settlements are marginalized, or, worse still, earmarked for demolition! How cruel are the images of violent evictions, bulldozers knocking down the tiny dwellings, images just like from a war. And this is what we see today.

You know that in the crowded slums where many of you live, values endure that have been forgotten in the rich centres. These settlements are blessed with a rich popular culture where public areas are not just transit corridors but an extension of the home, a place where bonds can

be forged with neighbours. How lovely are cities that overcome unhealthy mistrust and integrate those who are different, even making such integration a new factor of development. How lovely are cities that, in their architectural design, are full of spaces that unite, connect and foster recognition of the other. So the line to follow is neither eradication nor marginalization but urban integration. Moreover, not only must the word “integration” replace all talk of eradication; it must also supplant those projects that aim to varnish poor neighbourhoods, prettify the outskirts and daub make-up on social ailments instead of curing them by promoting genuine and respectful integration. It is a sort of cosmetic architecture, isn't it? And it is the trend. So let us keep on working so that all families have housing and so that all neighbourhoods have adequate infrastructure (sewage, light, gas, asphalted roads); and I go on: schools, hospitals or first aid clinics, sports clubs and all those things that create bonds and unite; and as I have already said, access to health care and to education and to secure tenancy.

Third, Work. There is no worse material poverty – I really must stress this – there is no worse material poverty than the poverty which does not allow people to earn their bread, which deprives them of the dignity of work. But youth unemployment, informality or underground work, and the lack of labour rights are not inevitable. These are the result of an underlying social choice in favour of an economic system that puts profit above man. If economic profit takes precedence over the individual and over humanity, we find a throw-away culture at work that considers humanity in itself, human beings, as a consumer good, which can be used and then thrown away.

Today, a new dimension is being added to the phenomena of exploitation and oppression, a very harsh and graphic manifestation of social injustice: those who cannot be integrated, the excluded, are discarded, the “leftovers”. This is the throw-away culture, and I would like to add something on this that I just remember now, I do not have it written down. This happens when the deity of money is at the centre of an economic system rather than man, the human person. Yes, at the centre of every social or economic system must be the person, image of God, created to “have dominion over” the universe. The inversion of values happens when the person is displaced and money becomes the deity.

I remember a teaching from around the year 1200 that illustrates this point. A Jewish Rabbi was explaining the story of the Tower of Babel to his faithful. He recounted the extraordinary effort required to build it: the bricks had to be made, and to make the bricks one had to mix mud and fetch straw, knead the mud with the straw, then cut it into squares, then dry them, then fire them, and after the bricks were fired and then cooled, hoist them up to keep on building the tower.

If a brick fell – a brick was very costly, given all the work – if a brick fell, it was almost a national tragedy. Whoever dropped it was punished or suspended or whatever. But if a worker fell, nothing happened. That is the situation when the person is at the service of the deity money – so said a Jewish Rabbi in the year 1200 explaining such terrible incidents.

And so, thinking about throw-away matter, we must also turn our attention to what is going on in our society. I am repeating what I have already said in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Today children are disposed of because the birth-rate in many of the world's countries has fallen, or because there is no food, or because they are killed before being born – children are thrown away.

The elderly are discarded, well, because they are useless, they are not productive. Neither children nor the elderly produce, and so, with more or less sophisticated systems, they are slowly being abandoned. And in the current period of economic crisis, now that it is necessary to regain a certain equilibrium, we are witnessing a third very painful disposal – the disposal of young people. Millions of young people — I do not want to give a precise figure because I do not know the exact number, and what I read seems somewhat inflated — anyhow, millions of young people are discarded from work, are unemployed.

In European countries where statistics are very clear, and specifically here in Italy, slightly more than 40% of young people are unemployed. Do you know what 40% of young people means? A whole generation is being cancelled, in order to restore the balance sheet. In another European country, it is over 50% and up to 60% in its southern region. These are clear counts of discarded debris. So in addition to discarding children and the elderly who do not produce, a generation of young people is to be sacrificed, people thrown away, in order to prop up and rebalance a system with the deity money at its centre and not the human person.

Despite this throw-away culture, this culture of leftovers, so many of you who are excluded workers, the discards of this system, have been inventing your own work with materials that seemed to be devoid of further productive value... But with the craftsmanship God gave you, with your inventiveness, your solidarity, your community work, your popular economy, you have managed to succeed, you are succeeding... And let me tell you, besides work, this is poetry. I thank you.

From now on every worker, within the formal system of salaried employment or outside it, should have the right to decent remuneration, to social security and to a pension. Among you here are waste-collectors, recyclers, peddlers, seamstresses or tailors, artisans, fishermen, farmworkers, builders, miners, workers in previously abandoned enterprises, members of all kinds of cooperatives and workers in grassroots jobs who are excluded from labour rights, who are denied the possibility of unionizing, whose income is neither adequate nor stable. Today I want to join my voice to yours and support you in your struggle.

During this meeting, you have also talked about Peace and Ecology. It is logical. There cannot be land, there cannot be housing, there cannot be work if we do not have peace and if we destroy the planet. These are such important topics that the peoples of the world and their popular organizations cannot fail to debate them. This cannot just remain in the hands of political leaders. All peoples of the earth, all men and women of good will – all of us must raise our voices in

defence of these two precious gifts: peace and nature or “Sister Mother Earth” as Saint Francis of Assisi called her.

Recently I said and now I repeat, we are going through World War Three but in instalments. There are economic systems that must make war in order to survive. Accordingly, arms are manufactured and sold and, with that, the balance sheets of economies that sacrifice man at the feet of the idol of money are clearly rendered healthy. And no thought is given to hungry children in refugee camps; no thought is given to the forcibly displaced; no thought is given to destroyed homes; no thought is given, finally, to so many destroyed lives. How much suffering, how much destruction, how much grief. Today, dear brothers and sisters, in all parts of the earth, in all nations, in every heart and in grassroots movements, the cry wells up for peace: War no more!

An economic system centred on the deity money also needs to plunder nature to sustain consumption at the frenetic level it needs. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in terrible cataclysms which we see and from which you the humble suffer most – you who live near the coast in precarious dwellings, or so economically vulnerable that you lose everything due to a natural disaster. Brothers and sisters, creation is not a possession that we can dispose of as we wish; much less is it the property of some, of only a few. Creation is a gift, it is a present, it is a marvellous gift given to us by God so that we might care for it and use it, always gratefully and always respectfully, for the benefit of everyone. You may be aware that I am preparing an encyclical on ecology. Rest assured that your concerns will have their place in it. I thank you, I take this opportunity to thank you for the letter on this topic that I received from members of *Via Campesina* (the international farmworkers’ organization), the Federation of *Cartoneros* and so many other brothers and sisters.

We talk about land, work, housing ... we talk about working for peace and taking care of nature. Why are we accustomed to seeing decent work destroyed, countless families evicted, rural farmworkers driven off the land, war waged and nature abused? Because in this system man, the human person, has been removed from the centre and replaced by something else. Because idolatrous worship is devoted to money. Because indifference has been globalized: “Why should I care what happens to others as long as I can defend what’s mine?” Because the world has forgotten God, who is Father; and by setting God aside, it has made itself an orphan.

Some of you said that this system cannot endure. We must change it. We must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need. This must be done with courage but also with intelligence, with tenacity but without fanaticism, with passion yet without violence. And all of us together, addressing the conflicts without getting trapped in them, always seeking to resolve the tensions in order to reach a higher plane of unity, of peace and of justice. We Christians have something very lovely, a guide to action, a programme we could call revolutionary. I earnestly recommend that you read it: the Beatitudes in Saint Matthew chapter 5 (cf. Mt 5:3) and in Saint Luke chapter 6 (cf. Lk 6:20); and the Last Judgment passage in Saint

Matthew chapter 25. This is what I told the young people at Rio de Janeiro: With these passages, you have the plan of action.

I know that you are persons of different religions, trades, ideas, cultures, countries, continents. Here and now you are practicing the culture of encounter, so different from the xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance which we witness so often. Among the excluded, one finds an encounter of cultures where the aggregate does not wipe out the particularities. That is why I like the image of the polyhedron, a geometric figure with many different facets. The polyhedron reflects the confluence of all the partialities that in it keep their originality. Nothing is dissolved, nothing is destroyed, nothing is dominated, everything is integrated. Nowadays you too are looking for that synthesis between the local and the global. I know that you work daily in what is close at hand and concrete, in your area, your neighbourhood, your work place. I also invite you to keep seeking that broader perspective so that our dreams might fly high and embrace the whole.

With all this I attach great importance to the proposal which some of you have shared with me, that these movements – these experiences of solidarity which grow up from below, from the subsoil of the planet – should come together, be more coordinated, keep on meeting one another as you have done these days. But be careful, it is never good to confine a movement in rigid structures, so I say you should keep on meeting. Even worse is the attempt to absorb movements, direct or dominate them – unfettered movements have their own dynamic; nevertheless, yes, we must try to walk together. Here we are in this Old Synod Hall (now there is a new one), and synod means precisely “to walk together”. May this be a symbol of the process that you have begun and are carrying forward.

Grassroots movements express the urgent need to revitalize our democracies, so often hijacked by innumerable factors. It is impossible to imagine a future for society without the active participation of great majorities as protagonists, and such proactive participation overflows the logical procedures of formal democracy. Moving towards a world of lasting peace and justice calls us to go beyond paternalistic forms of assistance; it calls us to create new forms of participation that include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny. And all this with a constructive spirit, without resentment, with love.

I accompany you wholeheartedly on this journey. From our hearts let us say together: No family without housing, no farmworker without land, no worker without rights, no one without the dignity that work provides.

Dear brothers and sisters, carry on with your struggle. You do us all good, like a blessing for humanity. Here are some rosaries made by Latin American artisans, waste collectors and grassroots workers, which I leave you as a memento, as a present and with my blessing.

And in this accompaniment I pray for you, I pray with you, and I want to ask God Our Father to go with you and bless you, to fill you with his love and accompany you on the way, abundantly giving you that strength that keeps us standing tall. That strength is hope, the hope that never lets us down. Thank you.

[1] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 300.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana