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Press Conference to present the Holy Father's Message for Lent 2020

Intervention by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Intervention by the Reverend Bruno Marie Duffé

Intervention by Dr. Mariella Enoc

At 11.30 this morning, in the Saint John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press Office, a press conference took place to present the Message of the Holy Father Francis for Lent 2020, entitled “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (*2 Cor 5: 20*).

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; the Reverend Bruno Marie Duffé, secretary of the same Dicastery; and Dr. Mariella Enoc, president of the *Bambino Gesù* Paediatric Hospital.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Introduction:

The Pope's Message for Lent 2020 bears the title: “*We implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God*” (*2 Cor 5:20*); and it is an entreaty (invitation) to overcome *estrangement from God* with *conversion: a return to God*. “*Conversion*” alone and unqualified can express a person's return to God; but it can also mean God's return to his people, after the people's sinfulness has, as it were, driven away God. This is the sense of the prayer in Ps.

80 after Ezek 10-11, (cf.43:4). But with the coming of Christ to share the nature of the human person to its deepest and ultimate detail, namely death and burial, his resurrection and his ascension into the glory of heaven so bind God with humanity that God can no more be said to have separated from the human person. It is now only the human person who can estrange himself/herself from God. Wherefore, Paul's entreaty in the *Lenten Message* to be "*reconciled to God*", can now only mean *the conversion and the return of the human person to God*.

About the Lenten Message:

Pope Francis' Lenten Message makes its point clearly already in the first paragraph. It is a call:

- a) to prepare to celebrate the *Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus with renewed hearts*
- b) to return continually to the *Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus in mind and heart* for the growth of its spiritual power within us.
- c) to respond freely to the spiritual power of *Jesus' death and resurrection*.

For Pope Francis, then, *to prepare to celebrate Easter with renewed hearts, to return continually, thereafter, in mind and heart to the sense of Easter for spiritual power within us, and to respond freely to Easter's offer of spiritual power*: is conversion. And it is rooted in the acceptance of God's love which is revealed in Christ, and which "*invites to a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with God and with other persons*" (*Christus vivit*, 117).

For Pope Francis, *a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with God* takes place in prayer: when we contemplate Jesus crucified and feel compassion for him, and along with him, the very many people and situations of suffering in the world; and commend them all to God's mercy.

But another *relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with people* also takes place when we are compassionate to people and show them mercy again and again. For the recognition of our own need for God's love and mercy (*ad essere misericordiati*) needs to dispose us to be merciful and compassionate to others, tolerating shortcomings and readiness to forgive. And this is very urgent!

The annual statistics of this country for 2019, published at the beginning of this year, showed, not only a woeful decline of birth. It also showed sadly that 33% of people in this land live alone, mostly out of broken relationships and the subsequent preference for autonomy and freedom.

But, the human being is not an individual. He/she is a *person, a relational being*. He/she is created to *coexist in the relationship of a family, community, society* etc, as equals in dignity and to pursue their *common good*. Relationships and dignity are what distinguish us as human beings, and no one else and nothing else in heaven or on earth is so constituted. As persons, created with inalienable dignity, we exist in relationship with others and, outside of relationship, less than human is what unfortunately we happen to be. This characteristic of the person, as relational being, underlies not only the principle of *solidarity* and of *subsidiarity*. Most importantly, it disposes us to respect the dignity and rights of every person, and enable us to embrace weak characters, the poor, the sick, the disfigured and the homeless: people who are usually spurned.[1] and considered poor for relations.

The Pope's *Message for Lent* reminds us of the bondage of sin we live under, and how dehumanizing sin makes our lives and relationships. Allowing ourselves to be reconciled to God and living under his gaze and in the spiritual power of the death and resurrection of Christ are not only pious religious practices; they heal our persons, as human and social beings. They heal our relationships, making our lives meaningful!

Intervention by the Reverend Bruno Marie Duffé

The time of Lent is, for Christians, in their personal life and in their community life, a time of conversion: a time of trial and a time of renewed joy, a time of death and a time of new life, the resurrection.

We remember this journey which is at the very heart of our faith, since Abraham, the first of the believers who set out for the Promised Land, prepared by God for him and for his descendants.

We remember the crossing of the desert by the people of the Covenant, guided by Moses, between hope and despair, between rebellion and trust.

We remember all the human experiences that take people from suffering to new birth: victims of an exile that leads them to cross seas and borders to escape death...

We remember Jesus, the Christ, who was sent to live and assumed our human experiences, from birth in the destitution of the crib to the destitution of death on the cross... From unworthy death to rising again, in the light of Easter morning. For we believe that God raised up His Son from death. And He wants to free every man, every living person, from that which locks him up in his loneliness, in his suffering and in his death. For God's love does not want man's suffering, loneliness, sadness and death. He wants him to convert and to turn his gaze towards a horizon of joy and fulfilment.

This is the heart of our faith: what we call the "kerygma" of our Tradition: a conviction that rests on the mystery of a "Love without measure": a Love that never resolves itself to situations of injustice and unworthiness, of slavery, in its old or present forms, of instrumentalisation that reduces the living to the state of an object... The God Whom Jesus proclaims, in caring for the poorest and the suffering, is a Father who wants to offer life to every being on the way: "a life in abundance" (Cf. the Gospel according to Saint John).

During this time of Lent 2020, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, makes a strong call to every Christian to turn his gaze to Christ crucified and to recognise Him, in His open arms, as a brother who assumes and liberates humanity from all its faults, from all its vagaries. This gaze towards the crucified is a call to rediscover the God of mercy, patience, compassion and forgiveness. God Who welcomes His child as the Father of the prodigal son. Contemplating Christ on the cross does not lead to despair but to the inner turmoil by which we become aware of God's desire to come to take His child, even in death. For if we pass through the cross, it is to be reborn, like Christ, in a Paschal experience: passing from night and death to light and new life.

There is "urgency to convert". The expression may be surprising, in its paradoxical character. Some will say: you are a believer or not: the alternative is simple. Many think so. Yet we know that each person is called to make the crossing, in a way that only God knows. And that it is therefore important never to close the path.

Conversion is an inner path: the path of prayer. It is an experience of "face to face" and "heart to heart" that leads us to truth and forgiveness. Forgiveness asked for, received and shared. A time of grace that frees us from all illusions and makes us pass, with Christ, from the path of death to a path of life and shared joy.

For conversion and the Easter experience open for us a new time: a new era and a new world. This is why we are called, during the time of Lent, to prayer, but also to fasting and the sharing of alms. For the experience of limitation and sobriety, the experience of shared bread and fraternity, make us rediscover God in the other, and the other as a part of ourselves.

The convocation of Pope Francis to a reflection of young people for a new economy, in Assisi, during this month of March, and then, in May, to a search for an education in fraternity, reflects this urgency of conversion and the topicality of the Easter experience. It is a question of making the crossing together, keeping our eyes turned by Christ and towards the Father's forgiveness, inspired by the Spirit of the Beatitudes and the attitude of service of which we are constantly reminded by Mary, She who prays at the foot of the cross and who sustains every person on the way towards Jesus, the Living One.

Intervention by Dr. Mariella Enoc

Lent is a “propitious time”, a “new opportunity”, Pope Francis suggests to us in His message. In this time of grace we are called to pause, to seek to mend the fractures between life and faith, to understand how we can better fulfil our mission, to carry out discernment.

One of the most intense passages of this year's message is the invitation to share wealth, instead of accumulating it. I feel profoundly touched by these words, especially in relation to my service as president of the *Bambino Gesù* Paediatric Hospital. It has principally two riches:

- medical and scientific knowledge
- know-how, the capacity for care and assistance.

Throughout the years the hospital has grown a lot, and it has become one of the world's largest centres for care and research. The constant striving towards excellence has not been a mere corporate policy objective, but a moral tension, a sort of ethical imperative: the duty of obedience - as the Holy Father reminded us at the last audience - “to the moral authority of sick and suffering children”. It is they who command. They are the ones who command our work, our thoughts, our research, our actions.

I believe that the ability to respond effectively to the health problems of children is a sign of evangelical tangibility that combines words and deeds. There is perhaps no greater poverty than that of those who are deprived of health because of a serious illness, a chronic illness - which accompanies you all your life - or a rare disease, whose name you cannot even discover. When a family brings a child to us, first of all they asks us to heal him, and if we cannot heal him, to care for him in the best possible way. This tangibility is our first moral duty. The ability to care, nourished by scientific research, is our first form of charity, our principal wealth to share.

Science and the skills acquired in the clinical field are not private property to be jealously guarded, but rather a talent to be made available to others, in accordance with the logic of the Gospel. Over the years, this awareness has given rise to the Hospital's experiences of international cooperation, which today see us engaged in projects, above all in training in many countries: from Syria to Central Africa, from Jordan to Tanzania, from India to Ethiopia, from China to Cambodia.

Saint John Paul II spoke of “The charity of knowledge that builds peace” (in 1983 during a speech at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences). The sharing of knowledge is exactly the principle that inspires all these international health cooperation projects of ours, the main way in which *Bambino Gesù* cultivates its vocation as the “Hospital of the Children of the World”, a concrete sign of the charity of the Church and the Pope. Through the training of doctors and the care of children all over the world, obviously within the limits of our possibilities, we have tried to interpret in a tangible way Pope Francis' “diplomacy of mercy”.

An original and at the same time exemplary model of our commitment is the experience of Bangui, in the Republic of Central Africa, where the Holy Father opened the Jubilee of Mercy in November 2015. In the subsequent three years we built a centre for malnourished children and renovated the wards; we trained medical and health personnel; and we received children in Rome who needed complex surgery that could not be performed in the Central African capital.

During the last year, more than 100 children from all over the world - not only from Bangui - have been taken in and treated by the hospital on a humanitarian basis, bearing all the costs thanks to the support of its Foundation and the generosity of many. The requests for help are many, and it is difficult to say no to those in search of hope.

But this time of Lent also demands that we do not take for granted what we do. We need to return to the profound meaning of our actions. And so for *Bambino Gesù* this period is an opportunity for confirmation. To understand if our gestures of sharing truly sow seeds of solidarity, which dismantle the ideology of the throwaway economy. To discern how to find every day the right measure between sustainability and openness to the world.
