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## **Video message of the Holy Father to the participants in the virtual seminar, “América Latina. Iglesia, Papa Francisco y los escenarios de la pandemia”**

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the virtual seminar promoted by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), to be held from 19 to 20 November on the theme: “América Latina: Iglesia, Papa Francisco y los escenarios de la pandemia”.

### **Video message of the Holy Father**

I welcome the participants in this virtual seminar entitled: “América Latina: Iglesia, Papa Francisco y los escenarios de la pandemia”, whose objective is to reflect on and analyse the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Latin America, its consequences and, above all, the possible lines of action, solidarity and aid to be developed by all those who constitute the beauty and hope of the continent. I thank the organisers for this initiative and I hope that it may inspire paths, awaken processes, create alliances and promote all the necessary mechanisms to guarantee a dignified life for our peoples, especially the most excluded, through the experience of brotherhood and the construction of social friendship. When I say the most excluded, I do not mean, I do not intend to say giving alms to the most excluded, or as a gesture of charity, no, but as a hermeneutic key. We have to start from there, from every human periphery, from everything, if we don't start from there it is a mistake. And this is perhaps the first purification of thought that we have to carry out.

The Covid pandemic amplified and made more evident the socio-economic problems and injustices that were already seriously affecting Latin America as a whole, and most severely, the poorest.

In the face of inequalities and discrimination, which widen the social gap, there are also the difficult conditions in which the sick find themselves, and many families are going through times of uncertainty, and suffer situations of social injustice. This is evident from the fact that not everyone has the necessary resources to take the minimum measures of protection against the Covid-19: a safe home to enable them to maintain social distance, water, sanitary resources to sanitise and disinfect their environments, and stable work guaranteeing access to benefits,

to name the most essential. I think we have to emphasise this a lot. It is about practical measures. Not only as a protective measure - as I mentioned just now - but as facts that should alarm us. Does everyone have a safe home? Does everyone have access to water? Does everyone have resources to sanitise and disinfect environments? Does everyone have a stable job? The pandemic made our pre-existing vulnerabilities even more visible.

I am also thinking at this time of our brothers and sisters who, in addition to suffering the onslaught of the pandemic, are saddened by the fact that the ecosystem around them is in serious danger from forest fires that are destroying vast areas such as the Pantanal wetlands and the Amazon, which are the lungs of Latin America and the world.

We are aware that the devastating effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt for a long time to come, especially in our economies, which require supportive attention and creative proposals to alleviate the weight of the crisis. In the Kingdom of God, which begins already in this world, bread reaches everyone and there is plenty of it, and social organisation is based on contributing, sharing and distributing, not on possessing, excluding and accumulating. I believe that these two triads should set the pace of our thinking. In the Kingdom of God bread reaches everyone and there is plenty of it; and social organisation is based on contributing, sharing and distributing, not on possessing, excluding and accumulating. Therefore, we are all called, individually and collectively, to carry out our work or mission with responsibility, transparency and honesty.

The pandemic has brought out the best and the worst in our peoples and the best and the worst in each person. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to regain an awareness of our common belonging. The virus reminds us that the best way to take care of ourselves is by learning to care for and protect those around us: awareness of our neighbourhood, awareness of our village, awareness of our region, awareness of our common home. We know that along with the Covid-19 pandemic, there are other social ills - homelessness, landlessness and lack of work, the famous three "Ls" [lodgings, land and labour] - that set the standard, and these require a generous response and immediate attention.

In the face of this bleak panorama, the Latin American peoples teach us that they are peoples with souls who know how to face crises with courage and know how to generate voices that shout in the desert and pave the way for the Lord (cf. *Mk* 1:3). Please do not let us be robbed of hope! The path of solidarity as justice is the best expression of love and closeness. We can come out of this crisis better, and so many of our sisters and brothers have borne witness to this in the daily giving of their lives and in the initiatives that the People of God have generated.

We have seen "the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial" (Extraordinary Moment of Prayer presided over by Pope Francis, 27 March 2020). At this point I also address those who exercise political responsibility, and I take the liberty of calling once again for the rehabilitation of politics, which "remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good". As I said in the recent Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*: "Recognising that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the "field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity". This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity" (*Fratelli tutti*, 180).

And this calls on all of us who have a leadership role to learn the art of meeting and not to encourage or endorse or use mechanisms that turn this serious crisis into an electoral or social tool. The depth of the crisis calls proportionally for a leading political class capable of raising its sights and directing and guiding legitimate differences in the search for viable solutions for our peoples. Discrediting the other succeeds only in undermining the possibility of finding agreements that may help alleviate the effects of the pandemic in our communities, but mainly for the most excluded. And we have in Latin America, I don't know about everything, but in a large part of Latin America, we are very capable of discrediting others. Who pays for this process of

discrediting? The people pay for it, we discredit others at the expense of the poorest, at the expense of the people. It is time that the distinctive mark of those who were anointed by their people to govern them be service of the common good, and not that the common good be put at the service of their interests. We all know the dynamics of the corruption that goes on in this area. And this is also true for the men and women of the Church; because corruption within the Church is a true leprosy that sickens and kills the Gospel.

I invite you, inspired by the light of the Gospel, to continue to go forth with all people of good will in search of those who cry out for help, in the manner of the Good Samaritan, embracing the weakest and building - the expression is very worn, but I will say it anyway - a new civilisation, because "goodness, as well as love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realised each day" (*Fratelli tutti*, 11).

In the face of these great challenges, let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe that our Latin American land not lose sign of her mother, that is, that she not lose the memory of her mother. May the crisis, far from separating us, help us to recover and value the awareness of that common *mestizaje* that unites us and makes us children of the same Father.

Once again it will do us good to remember that unity is superior to conflict. May her mantle, her mantle of Mother and Woman, shelter us as one people who, fighting for justice, can say: "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers" (*Lk 1:54-55*). Thank you very much.

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