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Audience with the members of the “Leaders pour la Paix” Foundation

The following is the greeting the Holy Father Francis addressed to members of the “Leaders pour la Paix” Foundation, received in audience today:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen!

I am pleased to address you, honorable Leaders devoted to peace, from various parts of the world. I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Raffarin for his kind words.

Our meeting takes place in a particularly critical historical moment, as we know. The pandemic, unfortunately, has not yet been overcome and its economic and social consequences, especially for the life of the poorest, are heavy. It has not only impoverished the human family of many lives, each one precious and unrepeatable; it has also spread desolation and increased tensions. Faced with the worsening of numerous convergent crises, political and environmental – hunger, climate, nuclear armament, to mention a few – your commitment to peace has never been so necessary and urgent.

The challenge is that of helping decision-makers and citizens to face critical issues as opportunities. For example: certain situations of environmental crisis, unfortunately aggravated by the pandemic, can and should provoke a more decisive assumption of responsibility, first and foremost on the part of the highest leaders and then, as a knock-on effect, also at the intermediate levels and within the citizenry as a whole. In reality, we also see, not infrequently, that solicitations and proposals come from the “grass roots”. This is very good, although at times such initiatives are exploited for other interests by ideologized groups. There is always the danger of “ideologization”. You can also play a constructive role in this socio-political dynamic, mainly by fostering a good knowledge of the problems and their root causes. This is part of the education for peace that is rightly close to your hearts.

The pandemic, with its long trail of isolation and social “hyper-tension”, has inevitably put political action itself, politics as such, into crisis. But even this fact can become an opportunity to promote “better politics”, without which it is not possible to develop “a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 154). A policy – I look from your perspective – that is implemented as “the art and architecture of peace” (cf. *ibid.*, 228-235). In order to build peace, both things are necessary: architecture, “to which different institutions of society contribute” (*ibid.*, 231), and artisanship, which must involve everyone, even those sectors that are often excluded or made invisible (cf. *ibid.*).

This therefore means working simultaneously at two levels: cultural and institutional. At the first level, it is important to promote a culture of faces, which place at the centre the dignity of the person, respect for his or her history, especially if wounded or marginalized. And also a culture of encounter, in which we listen to and welcome our brothers and sisters, “with confidence in the reserves of goodness present in human hearts” (*ibid.*, 196). At the second level – that of institutions – it is urgent to promote dialogue and multilateral collaboration, because multilateral agreements are better than bilateral ones at guaranteeing “the promotion of a truly universal common good and the protection of weaker states” (*ibid.*, 174). In any case, “let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims” (*ibid.*, 261).

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your visit and I encourage your commitment to peace and for a more just and fraternal society. May God grant you to experience in your life that joy that He promised to peacemakers. Thank you.
