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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the 49th Social Week of Catholic Italians

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the 49th Social Week of Catholic Italians, taking place in Taranto from 21 to 24 October 2021, on the theme “The planet we hope for: Environment, work, future. Everything is connected”:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I cordially greet all of you who are taking part in the 49th Social Week of Italian Catholics, convened in Taranto. I extend my fraternal greetings to Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, to Archbishop Filippo Santoro and the bishops present, to the members of the Scientific and Organising Committee, to the delegates from the Italian dioceses, to the representatives of movements and associations, to all those invited, and to those following the event from a distance.

This appointment has a special flavour. We feel the need to meet and see each other’s faces, to smile and plan, to pray and dream together. This is all the more necessary in the context of the crisis generated by Covid, a crisis that is both health-related and social. In order to emerge from this crisis, Italian Catholics too must be more courageous. We cannot resign ourselves and sit back and watch, we cannot remain indifferent or apathetic without taking responsibility for others and for society. We are called to be the yeast that leavens the dough (cf. *Mt 13:33*).

The pandemic has shattered the illusion of our time that we can consider ourselves omnipotent, trampling on the land we inhabit and the environment we live in. To get back on our feet, we must convert to God and learn to make good use of his gifts, first and foremost creation. Let us not lack the courage for ecological conversion, but above all let us not lack the ardour of community conversion. For this reason, I hope that Social Week will be a synodal experience, a full sharing of vocations and talents that the Spirit has inspired throughout Italy. For this to happen, it is also necessary to listen to the suffering of the poor, the last, the desperate, the families who are

tired of living in polluted, exploited, burnt-out places, devastated by corruption and degradation.

We need hope. The title chosen for this Social Week in Taranto, a city that symbolises the hopes and contradictions of our time, is significant: “The planet we hope for: Environment, work, future. Everything is connected”. There is a desire for life, a thirst for justice, a yearning for fullness that springs from the communities affected by the pandemic. Let us listen to it. It is in this sense that I would like to offer you some reflections that may help you walk boldly along the road to hope, which we can imagine is marked by three “road signs”.

The first is mindfulness of people at *crossings*. We encounter too many people who pass through our existences in conditions of despair: young people forced to leave their countries of origin to emigrate elsewhere, unemployed or exploited in an endless precariousness; women who have lost their jobs in the pandemic or who are forced to choose between motherhood or their profession; workers left at home without opportunities; poor people and migrants who are not welcomed and not integrated; elderly people abandoned to their loneliness; families who are victims of usury, gambling and corruption; businesspeople in difficulty and subject to the abuse of the mafia; communities destroyed by fires... But there are also so many sick people, adults and children, workers forced to do arduous or immoral work, often in conditions of precarious safety. These are faces and stories that challenge us: we cannot remain indifferent. These brothers and sisters of ours are crucified and awaiting resurrection. May the imagination of the Spirit help us leave no stone unturned to ensure that their legitimate hopes are realized.

A second sign indicates *no parking*. When we see dioceses, parishes, communities, associations, movements, ecclesial groups that are tired and discouraged, sometimes resigned in the face of complex situations, we see a Gospel that tends to fade away. On the contrary, God’s love is never static or renunciatory, “love believes all things, hopes all things” (1 Cor 13:7): it drives us on and forbids us to stop. It propels us and forbids us to stop. It sets us in motion as believers and disciples of Jesus on our way along the roads of the world, following the example of the One who is the way (cf. Jn 14:6) and has walked our roads. Let us not stay in sacristies, let us not form elitist groups that isolate themselves and close themselves off. Hope is always on the move and also passes through Christian communities, daughters of the resurrection, who go out, announce, share, endure and fight to build the Kingdom of God. How wonderful it would be if, in the areas most marked by pollution and degradation, Christians did not limit themselves to denouncing, but took on the responsibility of creating networks of redemption. As I wrote in the Encyclical *Laudato si’*, “It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress” (194). At times, fear and silence prevail, which end up favouring the actions of the wolves of malfeasance and individual interest. Let us not be afraid to denounce and oppose illegality, but above all, let us not be afraid to sow good!

A third road sign is the *obligation to turn*. The cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth call for it. “Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems” (61). Bishop Tonino Bello, a prophet in the land of Puglia, loved to repeat: “We cannot limit ourselves to hope. We must organise hope!”. A profound conversion awaits us, which touches the human ecology, the ecology of the heart, even before environmental ecology. The turning point will only come if we know how to train consciences not to look for easy solutions to protect those who are already secure, but to propose lasting processes of change for the benefit of the younger generations. Such a conversion, aimed at a social ecology, can nourish this time that has been called “ecological transition”, where the choices to be made cannot only be the result of new technological discoveries, but also of renewed social models. The epoch change we are going through demands a turning point. Let us look, in this sense, to many signs of hope, to many people whom I wish to thank because, often in industrious obscurity, they are working to promote a different economic model that is fairer and more attentive to people.

This, then, is the planet we hope for: one where the culture of dialogue and peace will bring forth a new day, where work confers dignity on the person and safeguards creation, where culturally distant worlds converge, inspired by a common concern for the common good. Dear brothers and sisters, I accompany your work with prayer and encouragement. I bless you, in the hope you will give form to the proposals of these days with

passion and concreteness. May the Lord fill you with hope. And please do not forget to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 4 October 2021

Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi

FRANCIS
