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Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Assisi on the occasion of the event “Economy of Francesco” (24 September 2022)

At 9.00 this morning, the Holy Father Francis departed from the Vatican heliport for Assisi, on the occasion of the event “Economy of Francesco”.

Upon arrival in the square in front of the Saint Mary of the Angels Pala-Eventi, the Pope was welcomed at the Lyrick Theatre by three young people, representing the participants in the event; the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J.; Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino, bishop of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino; the president of the Umbria region, Dr. Donatella Tesei; the prefect of Perugia, Dr. Armando Gradone; the mayor of Assisi and president of the province of Perugia, Dr. Stefania Proietti; the members of the organizing committee of the event, Professor Luigino Bruni, Dr. Francesca di Maolo and Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., and by representatives of the Franciscan Families of Assisi and *Pro Civitate Christiana*.

At 10.00, Pope Francis arrived onstage at the Lyrick Theatre, where the meeting with young people began. After various musical and theatrical interludes, the testimonies of eight young people, Pope Francis delivered his address. This was followed immediately by the reading of the letter and the signing of the “Pact”.

At the end, after greeting the young people present on the stage, the Holy Father returned by car to the square in front of the theatre, from where he departed by helicopter at 11.50 to return to the Vatican.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to young people during the event:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear young people, good morning!

I greet all those who are able to be here today. I would also like to greet those who could not make it, those at home. I greet all of you! We are all united: those joining us from various places and those present here.

I have waited more than three years for this moment, since 1 May 2019, when I wrote you the letter that *called* and then *brought* you here to Assisi. For many of you – as we have just heard – the encounter with the Economy of Francesco awakened something that was already within you. You were already committed to creating a new economy; my letter brought you together, gave you a broader horizon and made you feel part of a worldwide community of young people who have the same vocation. When a young person sees in another young person the same calling, and this experience is repeated with hundreds, even thousands of other young people, then great things become possible, even the hope of changing an enormous and complex system like the world economy. Indeed, it would appear that talking about economics today seems like an old thing: today we talk about *finance*, and finance is a watery thing, a gaseous thing, you cannot hold it. Once, a good world economist told me that she attended a conference on the link between economics, humanism and religion. The event went well. She wanted to do the same with finance and was not able to do so. Beware of this fleeting nature of finances: you must resume economic activity from the roots, from human roots as was done in the past. You young people, with the help of God, *know what to do, you can do it*; young people have done many things before in the course of history.

You are living your youth in a time that is not easy: the environmental crisis, then the pandemic, and now the war in Ukraine, and the other wars which have continued for years in various countries, have marked your lives. Our generation has left you with a rich heritage, but we have not known how to protect the planet and are not securing peace. When you hear that the fishermen of San Benedetto del Tronto, pulled 12 tons of dirt and plastic and other things out of the sea in one year, you realise that we do not know how to protect the environment. Nor do we know how to keep peace as a result. *You are called to become artisans and builders of our common home*, a common home that “is falling into ruin”. Today, a new economy inspired by Francis of Assisi can and must become an economy of friendship with the earth and an economy of peace. It is a question of transforming an economy that kills (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53) into an economy of life, in all its aspects. That “good life” is not the sweet life or living it well, no. Good living is the mysticism that the indigenous peoples teach us to have in relation to the earth.

I admire your decision to model this gathering in Assisi on *prophecy*. I liked what you said about prophecy. After his conversion, Francis of Assisi’s life was a prophecy that continues also into our own times. In the Bible, prophecy is very much connected with young people. Samuel was called as a boy, Jeremiah and Ezechiel were young, Daniel was a youth when he prophesied the innocence of Susanna and saved her from death (cf. *Dan* 13:45-50); and the prophet Joel announced to the people that God would send his Spirit and “their sons and daughters would prophesy” (3:1). According to Scripture, young people are the bearers of a spirit of knowledge and intelligence. It was the young David who humbled the arrogance of the giant Goliath (cf. *1 Sam* 17: 49-51). Indeed, when civil society and businesses lack the skills of the young, the whole of society withers and the life of everyone is extinguished. There is a lack of creativity, optimism, enthusiasm, and courage to take risks. A society and an economy without young people are sad, pessimistic and cynical. If you want to see this, go to these ultra-specialized universities in liberal economics, and look at the faces of the young men and women studying there. Yet, we are grateful to God that you are here: not only will you be there tomorrow, you are here today. You are not just the “not yet”, you are also the “already here”, you are the present.

An economy that inspires us with the prophetic dimension is expressed today in *a new vision of the environment and the earth*. We have to embrace this harmony with the environment and the earth. There are many people, businesses and institutions that are making an ecological conversion. We need to go forward on this road and do more. You are doing and asking everyone to do this “more”. It is not enough to make cosmetic changes; we need to discuss models of development. The situation is such that we cannot just wait until the next international summit, which might be too late. The earth burns today, and today we must change, at all levels. In this last year, you have worked on the *economy of plants*, an innovative topic. You have seen that the plant paradigm contains a different approach to the earth and the environment. Plants *cooperate* with their whole environmental surroundings, and also when they compete, they actually are cooperating for the good of the ecosystem. Let us learn from the *meekness* of plants: their humility and their silence can offer us a different approach, which we urgently need. For, if we speak of ecological transition but remain in the economic

paradigm of the twentieth century, which plundered the earth and its natural resources, then the strategies we adopt will always be insufficient or sick from the roots. The Bible is full of images of trees and plants, from the tree of life to the mustard seed. And Saint Francis helps us with his universal fraternity with all living creatures. We human beings, in these last two centuries, have grown at the expense of the earth. The earth is the one that pays the price. We have often plundered in order to increase our own well-being, and not even the well-being of all, but of a small group. Now is the time for new courage in abandoning fossil fuels to accelerate the development of zero or positive impact sources of energy.

We must also accept *the universal ethical principal* – however unpopular – that damages must be repaired. This is a universal, ethical principle: damage must be repaired. If we grew up abusing the planet and the atmosphere, today we must also learn to make sacrifices in lifestyles that remain unsustainable. Otherwise, our children and grandchildren will pay the price, a price that will be too high and too unjust. Six months ago, I listened to a very important scientist, who said: “Yesterday my granddaughter was born. If we continue like this, within thirty years the poor girl will have to live in an uninhabitable world”. Our children and grandchildren will pay the price, a price that will be very high and unfair. Quick and decisive change is needed. I say this with seriousness. I am counting on you! Please, do not be afraid to bother us! Be an example for us! And I tell you the truth: one needs courage to walk on this path, and sometimes it takes a little bit of heroism. In a meeting, I listened to a 25-year-old man, who had just graduated as an engineer, and who could not find a job. In the end, he found one in an industry about which he did not know much. When he realised what the job entailed, he refused it because they were making weapons. These are the heroes of today.

Sustainability, then, is a *multidimensional word*. Aside from the environmental, there are also the *social, relational and spiritual* dimensions. The social aspect is slowly beginning to be recognized: we are realizing that the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth are the same cry (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 49). When we work for ecological transformation, then, we must keep in mind the effects that some environmental choices have on poverty. Not all environmental solutions have the same effects on the poorest, and therefore those that reduce misery and inequality should be preferred. As we seek to save the planet, we must not neglect those who suffer. Carbon dioxide is not the only pollution that kills; inequality also fatally damages our planet. We must not allow the new environmental calamities to erase from public view the long-standing and ever-present calamities of social injustice, as well as political injustices. Let us think, for example, of a political injustice; the poor battered people of the Rohingya who wander from one place to another because they cannot live in their own homeland. It is a political injustice.

Then there is the unsustainability of our *relationships*: in many countries relationships between people are becoming impoverished. Especially in the West, communities are becoming increasingly fragile and fragmented. The family, and with it the acceptance and protection of life, is suffering a serious crisis in some regions of the world. Current consumerism seeks to fill the void of human relationships with ever more sophisticated commodities – loneliness is big business in our time! – but in this way it generates a *famine of happiness*. This is not a good thing. Think of the demographic winter, for example, and how it relates to all this. The demographic winter where the population of all countries is going down significantly because, instead of having children, people give greater attention to having emotional relationships with dogs and cats. We have to start procreating again. But also in this demographic winter there is the slavery of women: a woman who cannot be a mother because as soon as her belly begins to rise, they fire her; pregnant women are not always allowed to work.

Finally, there is a *spiritual* unsustainability to our capitalism. Human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are seekers of meaning before being seekers of material goods. We are all seekers of meaning. That is why the first capital of any society is spiritual capital, for this is what gives us a reason to get up every morning and go to work, and engenders the joy of living that is also necessary for the economy. Our world is quickly consuming this essential kind of capital, accumulated over centuries by religions, wise traditions and popular piety. Consequently, young people especially suffer from this lack of meaning: faced with the pain and uncertainties of life, they often find their souls depleted of the spiritual resources needed to process suffering, frustration, disappointment and grief. Go and look at the percentage of suicide among young people, and how the numbers are going up. They do even not publish everything, and sometimes hide the figures. The fragility of many young people comes from a lack of this precious spiritual capital – an invisible but more real capital than

financial or technological capital. I ask, do you have a spiritual capital? Everyone can answer quietly. We urgently need to rebuild this essential spiritual patrimony. Technology can do much: it teaches us the “what” and the “how”: but it does not tell us the “why”; and so our actions become sterile and do not bring fulfilment to life, not even economic life.

Finding myself in the city of Francis, I cannot help but speak about *poverty*. Developing an economy inspired by him means committing ourselves to putting the poor at the centre. Starting with them, we look at the economy; starting with them, we look at the world. There is no “Economy of Francesco” without respect, care and love for the poor, for every poor person, for every fragile and vulnerable person – from conception in the womb to the sick person with disabilities, to the elderly person in difficulty. I would go even further: an economy of Francesco must not limit itself to working for or with the poor. As long as our system “produces” discarded people, and we operate *according* to this system, we will be accomplices of an economy that kills. Let us ask ourselves. Are we doing enough to change this economy or are we content with painting a house in order to change its colour without changing the structure of the house? It is not a question of paint strokes, no: you have to change the structure. Perhaps our response should not be based on how much we can do but on how we are able to open new paths so that the poor themselves can become protagonists of change. In this regard, there are significant and developed examples in India and the Philippines.

Saint Francis loved not only the poor but poverty itself. This can also be called an austere way of living. Francis went to lepers not so much to love them but because *he wanted to become poor like them*. Following Jesus Christ, he stripped himself of everything to become poor with the poor. Indeed, the first market economy was born in the thirteenth century in Europe through daily contact with Franciscan Friars, who were friends of the first merchants. That economy certainly created wealth but it did not despise poverty. Our capitalism, instead, wants to help the poor but does not respect them; it does not understand the paradox in the beatitude: “Blessed are the poor” (cf. *Lk 6:20*). We do not have to love poverty. On the contrary, we need to combat it, above all, by creating work, dignified work. The Gospel tells us, however, that without respect for the poor, we cannot combat poverty. It is from here that all of us need to begin, including entrepreneurs and economists: living the evangelical paradoxes of Francis. When I talk to people or hear confessions, I always ask: “Do you give alms to the poor?” – “Yes, yes, yes!” – “And when you give alms to the poor, do you look him or her in the eye?” – “Eh, I don’t know ...” – “And when you give alms, do you throw the coin or touch the poor person’s hand?”. They do not look at the eyes and do not touch; and this is a way of distancing ourselves from the spirit of poverty, distancing ourselves from the true reality of the poor, distancing ourselves from the humanity that every human relationship must have. Someone will say to me: “Holy Father, we haven’t got much time, when are you finishing?”: I am finishing now.

In light of this reflection, I would like to leave you with three signposts for moving forward.

The first is *to look at the world with the eyes of the poorest of the poor*. In the medieval period, the Franciscan movement was able to create the first economic theories and even the first banks for those in need (“Monti di Pietà”), because *it looked at the world with the eyes of the poorest of the poor*. You too will improve the economy if you look at things from the perspective of victims and the discarded. In order to have the eyes of the poor and victims, however, it is necessary to get to know them, *to be their friends*. And, believe me, if you become friends of the poor, you will share their life, you will have a share in the Kingdom of God, because Jesus said that to these belong the Kingdom of God. For this reason, they are blessed (cf. *Lk 6:20*). I will say it again: may your daily choices not “produce” discarded people.

The second: you are mostly students, scholars and entrepreneurs, but *do not forget about work, do not forget about workers*. The work of our hands. Work is already the challenge of our time, and it will be all the more the challenge of tomorrow. Without dignified work and just remuneration, young people will not truly become adults and inequality will increase. It is possible, at times, for a person to survive without work but he or she does not live well. So while you create goods and services, *do not forget to create work, good work and work for everyone*.

The third signpost is *incarnation*. In the crucial moments of history, those who left a good mark were able to do

so because they translated ideals, desires and values into *concrete actions*. They “incarnated” them. In addition to writing and organizing conferences, these men and women established schools and universities, banks, trade unions, associations and institutions. You will change the economic world if you use your hands together with your heart and head. The three languages. When we think: we have the head, the language of thought. But we don’t stop there, we have to combine it with the language of feeling, the language of the heart. And not only that, we also have to link it with the language of the hands. So you have to do what you feel and think, feel what you do, and think what you feel and do. This is the union of the three languages. Ideas are necessary, they entice us, especially young people, but they can turn into traps if they do not become “flesh”, in other words something concrete, a daily commitment: the three languages. Ideas alone do not work; we will all finish up in an endless circle if we follow just ideas. Ideas are necessary, but they must take “flesh”. The Church has always rejected the gnostic – gnosis, that of idea alone – temptation of thinking that the world changes only through different knowledge, without the effort of the flesh. Actions are less “luminous” than great ideas because they are concrete, particular, limited, with light and shadow together, but they fertilize the ground day after day for reality is greater than an idea (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 233). Dear young people, reality is always bigger than idea: pay attention to this.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your efforts: thank you. Go forward together with the inspiration and intercession of Saint Francis. And if you are agreeable, I would like to conclude with a prayer. I will pray it aloud and you can follow me silently in your heart.

Father, we ask forgiveness for having damaged the earth, for not having respected indigenous cultures, for not having valued and loved the poorest of the poor, for having created wealth without communion. Living God, who with your Spirit have inspired the hearts, hands and minds of these young people and sent them on the way to a promised land, look kindly on their generosity, love and desire to spend their lives for a great ideal. Bless them, Father, in their undertakings, studies and dreams; accompany them in their difficulties and sufferings, help them to transform their difficulties and sufferings into virtue and wisdom. Support their longing for the good and for life, lift them up when facing disappointments due to bad examples, do let them become discouraged but instead may they continue on their path. You, whose only begotten Son became a carpenter, grant them the joy of transforming the world with love, ingenuity and hands. Amen.

Thank you very much.
