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Audience with a delegation from the “Instituto Europeo de Estudios Internacionales de Salamanca”

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the “Instituto Europeo de Estudios Internacionales de Salamanca”, Spain, to whom he addressed the following greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,

Dear brothers and sisters,

Thank you for coming; it is a pleasure for me to welcome you back to this house and to share with you the fruit of research on the current political and social situation. Rome has been a melting pot of cultures and peoples for millennia. Everyone has passed through here, and they have fused together, in a melting pot. Heir to this universal vocation, the See of Peter has always been attentive to the vicissitudes of all peoples, their efforts and their difficulties to achieve a better life, seeking to ensure that they attain the peace that the Lord promised his disciples (cf. *Jn* 14:26-27).

This peace not only exceeds what we can achieve by merely human means, but also demands of us that it is not simply based on balances of power or the silencing of the just demands of the less favoured. Nevertheless, peace among men is an essential good for which we must work zealously and fervently to beseech God. This attitude of pacifying will result in peace. But it is an attitude so human: it is difficult always to pacify, because our first reaction is to grab a stone and throw it at the other, to declare war. And then afterwards to negotiate. No, to pacify is much easier as it saves two steps.

Unfortunately, the current situation brings to mind something in *Fratelli tutti*: “Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics, a failure of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (no. 261).

If we think that in this last century there were three world wars, 1914 to 1918, 1939 to 1945 and this current one, which is a world war, how do we understand this? Think that weapons production is the most important budget item, and think that one year without the production of weapons would solve the problem of hunger worldwide. So, we already have a belligerent tendency towards destruction, and if we think that nowadays weapons technology has reached the point that with one bomb an entire city like this one can be destroyed, what are we waiting for? We are on that path... it seems that this is not understood. This is why the struggle for human understanding and peace has to be tireless – we cannot afford to take a break from this.

War is terrible. However, we must not give up: from these ashes we are seeing today something new can emerge, in this failure we can find a life lesson. It is necessary to read about previous wars. When in 2014 I went to Redipuglia for the centenary, I saw those tombs and something inside me churned. I cried like a baby. Every 2 November I go to a cemetery to celebrate. Once I went to Anzio, to the American cemetery. In Anzio there was one of the landings, and I saw the ages of the soldiers: 20, 21, 19, 22. Something inside me churned. We have not learned. A short while ago – I don't know when, a year or so ago – the seventieth anniversary of the Normandy landings was commemorated. Various heads of government gathered to commemorate this, which was the beginning of the end of Nazism, or rather the liberation of Europe. But no-one remembered that thirty thousand young men were left on the beaches in Normandy, thirty thousand! "I have the honour of informing you that you are the mother of a hero who gave his life for the homeland", and a medal. It is the tragedy of war, when will we understand? In my journey in Romania and Slovakia, when I passed through the countries, there were people who greeted me, boys, girls, young married couples, young men, young women, but of a certain age there were only women, there were almost no older men: war! All this is very hard. I think we must react: war is terrible. And we must do something new with this failure, find a life lesson. And what seems to be a defeat or a reason for shame can, like the scandal of the cross, be transformed into a victory. How? If by our prayer and our work we are capable of offering solutions, of uniting wills, of bearing witness that the love, brotherhood and true humanism born of faith can defeat hatred, rejection and brutality. Please!

And it is a challenge that you have set yourselves, and I thank you for this desire to contribute, from your sciences, valid elements that may help everyone to move forward on this journey of brotherhood, along the path of peace, of human unity. God bless you. And thank you for what you are doing, thank you. And let us go forward without discouragement. Thank you.
