

General Audience (5.06.2013): *Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!*

Today I would like to reflect on the issue of the environment, as I have already had an opportunity to do on various occasions. I was also prompted to think about this because of today's World Environment Day, sponsored by the United Nations, which is launching a pressing appeal for the need to eliminate waste and the destruction of food.

When we talk about the environment, about creation, my thoughts go to the first pages of the Bible, to the Book of Genesis, where it says that God puts men and women on the earth to till it and keep it (cf. 2:15). And these questions occur to me: What does cultivating and preserving the earth mean? Are we truly cultivating and caring for creation? Or are we exploiting and neglecting it? The verb "cultivate" reminds me of the care a farmer takes to ensure that his land will be productive and that his produce will be shared.

What great attention, enthusiasm and dedication! Cultivating and caring for creation is an instruction of God which he gave not only at the beginning of history, but has also given to each one of us; it is part of his plan; it means making the world increase with responsibility, transforming it so that it may be a garden, an inhabitable place for us all. Moreover on various occasions Benedict XVI has recalled that this task entrusted to us by God the Creator requires us to grasp the pace and the logic of creation. Instead we are often guided by the pride of dominating, possessing, manipulating and exploiting; we do not "preserve" the earth, we do not respect it, we do not consider it as a freely-given gift to look after.

We are losing our attitude of wonder, of contemplation, of listening to creation and thus we no longer manage to interpret in it what Benedict XVI calls "the rhythm of the love-story between God and man". Why does this happen? Why do we think and live horizontally, we have drifted away from God, we no longer read his signs.

However "cultivating and caring" do not only entail the relationship between us and the environment, between man and creation. They also concern human relations. The popes have spoken of a human ecology, closely connected with environmental ecology. We are living in a time of crisis; we see it in the environment, but above all we see it in men and women. The human person is in danger: this much is certain — the human person is in danger today, hence the urgent need for human ecology! And the peril is grave, because the cause of the problem is not superficial but deeply rooted. It is not merely a question of economics but of ethics and anthropology. The Church has frequently stressed this; and many are saying: yes, it is right, it is true... but the system continues unchanged since what dominates are the dynamics of an economy and a finance that are lacking in ethics. It is no longer man who commands, but money, money, cash commands. And God our Father gave us the task of protecting the earth — not for money, but for ourselves: for men and women. We have this task! Nevertheless men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the "culture of waste". If a computer breaks it is a tragedy, but poverty, the needs and dramas of so many people end up being considered normal. If on a winter's night, here on the Via Ottaviano — for example — someone dies, that is not news. If there are children in so many parts of the world who have nothing to eat, that is not news, it seems normal. It cannot be so! And yet these things enter into normality: that some homeless people should freeze to death on the street — this doesn't make news. On the contrary, when the stock market drops 10 points in some cities, it constitutes a tragedy. Someone who dies is not news, but lowering income by 10 points is a tragedy! In this way people are thrown aside as if they were trash.

This “culture of waste” tends to become a common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are not yet useful — like the unborn child — or are no longer of any use — like the elderly person. This culture of waste has also made us insensitive to wasting and throwing out excess foodstuffs, which is especially condemnable when, in every part of the world, unfortunately, many people and families suffer hunger and malnutrition. There was a time when our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any left over food. Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess and to the daily waste of food, whose value, which goes far beyond mere financial parameters, we are no longer able to judge correctly.

Let us remember well, however, that whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry! I ask everyone to reflect on the problem of the loss and waste of food, to identify ways and approaches which, by seriously dealing with this problem, convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged.

A few days ago, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, we read the account of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish. And the end of this passage is important: “and all ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces (Lk 9:17). Jesus asked the disciples to ensure that nothing was wasted: nothing thrown out! And there is this fact of 12 baskets: why 12? What does it mean? Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, it represents symbolically the whole people. And this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members. Human and environmental ecology go hand in hand.

I would therefore like us all to make the serious commitment to respect and care for creation, to pay attention to every person, to combat the culture of waste and of throwing out so as to foster a culture of solidarity and encounter. Thank you.

## 2

*Evangelii Gaudium* (November 2013), § 56. *No to the new idolatry of money*: “In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.”

§ 215. Concern for the vulnerable: There are other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations. Here I would make my own the touching and prophetic lament voiced some years ago by the bishops of the Philippines: “An incredible variety of insects lived in the forest and were busy with all kinds of tasks... Birds flew through the air, their bright plumes and varying calls adding color and song to the green of the forests... God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland... After a single night’s rain, look at the chocolate brown rivers in your locality and remember that they are carrying the life blood of the land into the sea... How can fish swim in sewers like the Pasig and so

many more rivers which we have polluted? Who has turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?”<sup>1</sup>

§ 216. Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples.

### 3

World Day of Peace, 2014, § 9. *Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature:*

The human family has received from the Creator a common gift: nature. The Christian view of creation includes a positive judgement about the legitimacy of interventions on nature if these are meant to be beneficial and are performed responsibly, that is to say, by acknowledging the “grammar” inscribed in nature and by wisely using resources for the benefit of all, with respect for the beauty, finality and usefulness of every living being and its place in the ecosystem. Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.

In a particular way, the *agricultural sector* is the primary productive sector with the crucial vocation of cultivating and protecting natural resources in order to feed humanity. In this regard the continuing disgrace of hunger in the world moves me to share with you the question: *How are we using the earth’s resources?* Contemporary societies should reflect on the hierarchy of priorities to which production is directed. It is a truly pressing duty to use the earth’s resources in such a way that all may be free from hunger. Initiatives and possible solutions are many, and are not limited to an increase in production. It is well known that present production is sufficient, and yet millions of persons continue to suffer and die from hunger, and this is a real scandal. We need, then, to find ways by which all may benefit from the fruits of the earth, not only to avoid the widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs, but above all because it is a question of justice, equality and respect for every human being. In this regard I would like to remind everyone of that necessary *universal destination of all goods* which is one of the fundamental principles of the Church’s social teaching. Respect for this principle is the essential condition for facilitating an effective and fair access to those essential and primary goods which every person needs and to which he or she has a right.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Letter *What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?* (29 January 1988).