



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GREEN AND BLUE FESTIVAL,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2023 WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**

Monday, 5 June 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters!

More than fifty years have passed since the first major United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm, on 5 June 1972. It initiated several meetings that called the international community to discuss how the human family cares for our common home. As such, 5 June was designated World Environment Day. I recall that, during my visit to Strasbourg, the then President Hollande had invited the Minister for the Environment, Mrs Ségolène Royal, to welcome me. She told me that she had heard that I was writing something on the environment. I replied, yes I was talking to a group of scientists and also a group of theologians. She then said: “Please publish it before the Paris Conference”. So that was what happened, and Paris was a very constructive meeting, not because of my own document but because the meeting was high level. After Paris, however... I am concerned.

Much has changed over this half-century. We need only think of the advent of new technologies and the impact of transversal and global phenomena such as the pandemic or the transformation of an increasingly globalized society that “makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers”. [1] We have also witnessed an “increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature”, which has given rise to a “growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet” (*Laudato Si'*, 19). Experts are clear that the impact of the choices and actions made in this current decade will be felt for thousands of years. [2] Our understanding has thus grown concerning the impact our actions will have on our common home and on those who dwell here, both now and in the future. This has also increased our sense of responsibility to God,

who has entrusted us with the care of creation, to our neighbours and to future generations.

“Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities” (*ibid.*, 165).

The phenomenon of climate change firmly reminds us of these responsibilities, since it particularly affects the poorest and weakest who have contributed least to its occurrence. This is first a question of justice and then of solidarity. Climate change also calls us to base our actions on responsible cooperation on the part of everyone, for our world is now thoroughly interdependent and cannot allow itself to be divided into blocs of countries that promote their own interests in an isolated or unsustainable way. “The wounds inflicted on our human family by the Covid-19 pandemic and the phenomenon of climate change are comparable to those resulting from a global conflict”, [3] where the real enemy is an irresponsible behaviour that has profound consequences for every aspect of the lives of the men and women of today and tomorrow. A few years ago, some fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto came to see me. In the space of just one year they had been able to remove twelve tonnes of plastic from the sea!

As in the aftermath of the Second World War, “the international community as a whole needs to set as a priority the implementation of collegial, solidary and farsighted actions”, [4] recognising the “appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face” (*Laudato Si'*, 15). An appealing, immense and urgent challenge that needs a cohesive and proactive response.

This is an “immense” and demanding challenge, then, because it requires a change of course, a decisive shift in the current model of consumption and production, all too often entrenched in the “throwaway” culture that is indifferent towards both the environment and people. Today a group from the McDonald’s Corporation visited; they told me that they have abolished plastic and use only recyclable paper, for everything... In the Vatican plastic has been banned, and I understand that we are now 93% plastic-free. These are steps, real steps that we have to continue. Real steps.

Moreover, many in the scientific community have pointed out that changing this model is “urgent” and can no longer be postponed. A great scientist recently said – some of you were certainly present – “Yesterday my granddaughter was born; I would not like her to be living in an uninhabitable world thirty years from now”. We must do something. It is urgent and cannot be postponed.

We must therefore consolidate “dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (*ibid.*, 14), well aware that living out “our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect” (*ibid.*, 217) of our experience of life.

This challenge, then, is “appealing”, stimulating and achievable: to move away from the throwaway culture towards ways of living marked by a culture of respect and care; care of creation and care of our neighbours, whether they be near or far from us either geographically or through time. We are facing an educational journey for transforming our society, a conversion that is at the same time both personal and communal (cf. *ibid.*, 219).

Indeed, there are plenty of opportunities and initiatives that aim to take this challenge seriously. Here, I greet the representatives of a number of cities from various continents. Your presence makes me think how this challenge must be addressed at all levels, in a subsidiary way: from small daily choices, to local and international policies. Again, we must underline the importance of responsible cooperation at every level. We need everyone to contribute. Yet this costs us. I remember the fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto telling me: “For us, the choice was somewhat difficult at the beginning, because removing plastic instead of fish didn’t earn us any money”. But there was something deeper: their love for creation was greater. They saw both plastic and fish... and did what they had to do. But it costs!

We also ought to speed up this change of course in favour of a *culture of care* – like our care for children – which places human dignity and the common good at the centre. And which is nurtured by “that *covenant between human beings and the environment*, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying”. [5]

“Let us not rob the new generations of their hope in a better future”. [6] Thank you for all that you are doing.

[1] BENEDICT XVI , Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 19.

[2] Cf IPCC, *Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report, Summary or Policymakers*, C1, p. 24.

[3] *Message to the President of COP26*, 29 October 2021.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] BENEDICT XVI , Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 50.

[6] *Video-Message to the Climate Ambition Summit*, 12 December 2020.
