



The Holy See

***VIDEO MESSAGE OF THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE,
ON BEHALF OF THE HOLY FATHER,
FOR WORLD WATER DAY 2021***

[Multimedia]

To His Excellency Dr. Qu Dongyu
Director General of the FAO

To Her Excellency Dr. Audrey Azoulay
Director General of UNESCO

Your Excellencies,

It is an honour for me to greet you warmly, also on behalf of the Holy Father, on the occasion of World Water Day 2021.

The theme chosen for this year, “Valuing Water,” invites us to be more responsible in the protection and use of this element, fundamental for the preservation of our planet. Indeed, without water, there would be no life, no urban centres, no agricultural, forestry or livestock productivity. Yet this resource has not been granted the care and attention it deserves. Even today we continue to make the mistake of wasting it, disregarding it or polluting it.

Moreover, in the 21st century, in the age of progress and technological advances, access to safe, drinkable water is not within everyone's reach. The Holy Father reminds us that water is “a basic and universal human right ... a condition for the exercise of other human rights” (Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 30); a good to which all human beings, without exception have the right to

have adequate access, so that they can lead a dignified life. Thus, “our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity” (*ibid.*).

Added to this sad reality today are the harmful effects of climate change: floods, droughts, rising temperatures, sudden and unpredictable variability in rainfall, thaws, diminishing river flows or depletion of groundwater. All these phenomena damage and impair water quality and thus prevent a serene and fertile life. The spread of the throw-away culture and the globalisation of indifference, which make people feel empowered to plunder and exploit creation, also contribute to this state of affairs. Not to mention the current health crisis, which has widened existing social and economic inequalities, highlighting the damage caused by the absence or inefficiency of water services among those most in need.

Thinking of those who today lack such a substantial commodity as water, as well as of the generations that will succeed us, I invite all to work to end the pollution of seas and rivers, of underground streams and springs, through educational work to promote change in our lifestyles, and the search for goodness, truth, beauty and communion with others for the common good. Let these be the approaches that determine the choices of consumption, savings and investments (cf. St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 36).

"Valuing water", as this year's theme says, therefore means changing our own language. Instead of talking about its "consumption", we should refer to its sensible "use", in accordance with our real needs and respecting those of others. For “those who enjoy a surplus of water yet choose to conserve it for the sake of the greater human family” - the Holy Father tells us - “have attained a moral stature that allows them to look beyond themselves” (Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 117). If we live with sobriety and place solidarity at the centre of our criteria, we will use water rationally, without wasting it uselessly, and we will be able to share it with those who need it most. For example, if we protect wetlands, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enable smallholder irrigation and improve resilience in rural areas, low-income communities, who are the most vulnerable in terms of water supply, would benefit and be lifted out of their prostration and neglect.

"Valuing water" can also mean recognising that food security and water quality are closely linked. Indeed, water plays an essential role in all aspects of food systems: in production, processing, preparation, consumption and, in part, also in the distribution of food. Access to safe water and adequate sanitation reduces the risk of food contamination and the spread of infectious diseases, which affect people's nutritional status and health. Many, if not most, food-borne diseases are in fact caused by the poor quality of the water used in their production, processing and preparation.

In order to guarantee fair access to water, it is vital to act without delay, to put an end once and for all to its waste, commodification and contamination. Collaboration between states, the public and private sectors, as well as an increase in initiatives by intergovernmental bodies, is more

necessary than ever. There is also an urgent need for binding legal coverage and systematic and effective support to ensure that drinking water reaches all parts of the world in adequate quantity and quality.

Let us make haste, therefore, to give drink to the thirsty. Let us correct our lifestyles so that we do not waste and pollute. Let us become protagonists of that goodness which led Saint Francis of Assisi to describe water as a sister "who is very humble, and precious and chaste"! (*Canticle of Creatures*: FF263). These are resolutions I entrust to the Almighty to help us to carry them out to the best of our ability.

From the Vatican, 22 March 2021

Cardinal Pietro Parolin,
Secretary of State to His Holiness

Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 22 March 2021

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