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“Christian hope responds to all the challenges of humanity”

In his 19 November general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued his catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about integral ecology.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

We are reflecting, in this Jubilee Year dedicated to hope, on the relationship between the Resurrection of Christ and the challenges of the contemporary world, that is, our challenges. At times, Jesus, the Living One, wants to ask us too: “Why do you weep? Who do you seek?” Indeed, challenges cannot be faced alone and tears are a gift of life when they purify our eyes and liberate our gaze.

John the Evangelist draws our attention to a detail that we do not find in the other Gospels: weeping near the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene did not immediately recognize the risen Jesus, but thought He was the gardener. Indeed, already narrating the burial of Jesus, at sunset on Good Friday, the text was very precise: “Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been

laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there” (*Jn* 19:40-41).

Thus, in the peace of the Sabbath and the beauty of a garden, the dramatic struggle between darkness and light that began with the betrayal, arrest, abandonment, condemnation, humiliation and killing of the Son, who “having loved his own who were in the world ... loved them to the end” (*Jn* 13:1), comes to a close. Cultivating and keeping the garden is the original task (cf. *Gen* 2:15) that Jesus brought to fulfilment. His last words on the cross – “It is finished” (*Jn* 19:30) – invite each of us to rediscover the same task, our task. For this reason, “He bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (v. 30).

Dear brothers and sisters, Mary Magdalene was not entirely mistaken then, believing she had encountered

the gardener! Indeed, she had to hear her own name again and understand her task from the new Man, the one who in another text of John says: “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev 21:5*). Pope Francis, with the encyclical *Laudato si'*, showed us the extreme need for a contemplative gaze: if he is not the custodian of the garden, the human being becomes its destroyer.

Christian hope therefore responds to the challenges to which all humanity is exposed today by dwelling in the garden where the Crucified One was laid as a seed, to rise again and bear much fruit.

Paradise is not lost, but found again. In this way, the death and resurrection of Jesus are the foundation of a spirituality of integral ecology, outside of which the words of faith have no hold on reality and the words of science remain outside the heart. “Ecological

culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance” (*Laudato si'*, no. 111).

For this reason, we speak of an ecological *conversion*, which Christians cannot separate from the reversal of course that Jesus asks of them. A sign of this is Mary’s turning around on that Easter morning: only by conversion after conversion do we pass through that vale of tears to the new Jerusalem. This passage, which begins in the heart and is spiritual, changes history, engages us publicly, and activates solidarity that now protects people and creatures from the longings of wolves, in the

name and power of the Lamb-Shepherd.

In this way, the sons and daughters of the Church can now meet millions of young people and other men and women of good will who have heard the cry of the poor and the earth, letting it touch their hearts. There are also many people who desire, through a more direct relationship with creation, a new harmony that will lead them beyond so many divisions. On the other hand, still “the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (*Ps 18:1-4*).

May the Spirit give us the ability to listen to the voice of those who have no voice. We will see, then, what the eyes do not yet see: that garden, or Paradise, which we will only reach by welcoming and fulfilling our own task.

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