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Solidarity and the Virtue of Faith

In his 2 September general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on the Church's social teaching, meeting with people face to face for the first time after many months.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After many months we meet each other again our face to face, rather

than screen to screen. Face to face. This is good! The current pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all linked to each other, for better or for worse. Therefore, to come out of this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone. Together. Alone no, because it cannot be done. Either it is done together, or it is not done. We must do it together, all of us, in *solidarity*. I would like to underline this word today: *solidarity*.

As a human family we have our common origin in God; we dwell in a common home, the garden-planet, the earth where God placed us; and we have a common destination in Christ. But when we forget all this, our *interdependence* becomes *dependence* of some on others, we lose this harmony of interdependence and solidarity and we become dependent -- the dependence of some on a few, on

others -- increasing inequality and marginalisation; it weakens the social fabric and the environment deteriorates. It is always the same. The same way of acting.

Therefore, the principle of solidarity is now more necessary than ever, as Saint John Paul II taught (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38-40). In an interconnected world, we experience what it means to live in the same “global village”; this expression is beautiful, isn’t it? The big wide world is none other than a global village, because everything is interconnected, but we do not always transform this *interdependence* into *solidarity*. There is a long journey between interdependence and solidarity. Selfishness -- individual, national and power-groups -- and ideological rigidities instead sustain "structures of sin” (*ibid*., 36).

“The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts - the odd sporadic act - of generosity". Much more! “It presumes the creation of a new mindset; a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 188). This is what “solidarity” means. It is not merely a question of helping others - it is good to do so, but it is more than that - it is a matter of justice (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1938-1949). Interdependence, in order to be in solidarity and to bear fruit, needs strong roots in the humanity and nature created by God; it needs respect for faces and for the land.

The Bible, from the very beginning, warns us of this. Think of the account of the Tower of Babel (see

Gen 11: 1-9), which describes what happens when we try to reach heaven - that is, our destination - ignoring our bond with humanity, creation and the Creator. It is a figure of speech. This happens every time that someone wants to climb up and up, without taking others into consideration. Just myself, no? Think about the tower. We build towers and skyscrapers, but we destroy community. We unify buildings and languages, but we mortify cultural wealth. We want to be masters of the Earth, but we ruin biodiversity and ecological balance. In another audience I spoke about those fishermen from San Benedetto del Tronto, who came this year, and they told me that this year: “We have taken 24 tonnes of waste out of the sea, half of which was plastic”. Just think1 These people have the task of catching fish -- yes -- but also refuse, and of taking it out of the water to clean up the sea. But this is ruining

the earth - not having solidarity with the earth, which is a gift - and the ecological balance.

I remember a medieval account of this “Babel syndrome”, which occurs when there is no solidarity. This medieval account says that, during the building of the tower, when a man fell -- they were slaves, weren’t they? -- and died, no-one said anything, or at best, “Poor thing, he made a mistake and he fell”. Instead, if a brick fell, everyone complained. And if someone was to blame, he was punished. Why? Because a brick was costly to make, to prepare, to fire… All of this. It took time to produce a brick, and work. A brick was worth more than a human life. Every one of us, think about what happens today. Unfortunately, something of the type can happen nowadays too. When shares fall in the financial markets, all the agencies report the news -- we have seen it in the newspapers in

these days. Thousands of people fall due to hunger and poverty, and no-one talks about it.

Pentecost is diametrically opposed to Babel (see *Acts* 2: 1-3), we heard at the beginning of the audience. The Holy Spirit, descending from above like wind and fire, sweeps over the community closed up in the Cenacle, infuses it with the power of God, and inspires it to go out and announce the Lord Jesus to everyone. The Spirit creates unity in diversity; He creates harmony. In the account of the Tower of Babel, there is no harmony; only pressing forward in order to earn. There, others are simply instruments, mere “manpower”, but here, in Pentecost, each one of us is an instrument, but a community instrument that participates fully in building up the community. Saint Francis of Assisi knew this well, and inspired by the Spirit, he gave all people, indeed creatures, the name

of brother or sister (see *LS* 11; see Saint Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, VIII, 6: *FF* 1145). Even brother wolf, remember.

With Pentecost, God makes Himself present and inspires the *faith* of the community *united in diversity and in solidarity*. Diversity and solidarity united in harmony, this is the way. A diversity in solidarity possesses "antibodies" that ensure that the singularity of each person -- which is a gift, unique and unrepeatable -- not sicken with individualism, with selfishness. Diversity in solidarity also possesses antibodies that heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice, systems of oppression (see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 192). Therefore, solidarity today is the road to take towards a post-pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social sicknesses.

There is no other way. Either we go ahead along the road of solidarity, or things will worsen. I want to repeat this: one does not come out of a crisis the same as before. The pandemic is a crisis. We emerge from a crisis either better or worse than before. It is up to us to choose. And solidarity is, indeed, a way of coming out of the crisis better, not with superficial changes, with a fresh coat of paint so everything looks fine. No. Better!

In the midst of crises, a *solidarity* guided by *faith* enables us to translate the love of God in our globalised culture, not by building towers or walls -- and how many walls are being built today! -- that divide, but then collapse, but by interweaving communities and sustaining processes of growth that are truly human and solid. And to do this, solidity helps. I would like to ask a question: do I think of the needs of

others? Everyone, answer in your heart.

In the midst of crises and tempests, the Lord calls to us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked. May the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity. Thank you.

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