
SPEECH MADE BY POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD MEETING OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS

Old Synod Hall

Tuesday 28 October 2014

Hello again, I am very pleased to be with you here today and I must say this is the first time I've been in this hall. As I said, it gives me great joy to be here and I offer you all a very warm welcome. Thank you for accepting this invitation to debate so many of the pressing social problems afflicting our world today, especially as victims yourselves of inequality and exclusion. Thank you to Cardinal Turkson for his welcome speech. Thank you, Your Eminence, for your work and your words.

This meeting of Popular Movements is a sign, a great sign: you gathered here today to present before God, the Church and the people a reality that is too often silenced. The poor not only suffer injustice but also fight against it!

They will not settle for false promises, excuses or pretences. Nor are they simply waiting helplessly for handouts from NGOs, welfare plans or solutions that never materialise or if they do are completely one-directional or aim to anaesthetise or pacify the affected communities. This is a dangerous strategy. You all know that the poor are no longer willing to wait; they want to play an active role, they are creating organisations, studying, working, protesting and, above all, are united by that special bond formed among those who suffer, among the poor, which our civilisation seems to have forgotten, or at least is very keen to forget.

Solidarity is a word that is not always well received, I would even say that, at times, it is seen as a dirty word that ought not to be used; however, it means so much more than just a few sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting as a community, prioritising the life of all members of society over the appropriation of goods by a select few. It is also the fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, and the violation of social and worker rights. It means speaking out against the devastating effects of the Empire of money: forced displacements, painful emigrations, human trafficking, drugs, war, violence and all these situations that many of you suffer and which we are all working to change. Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history and that is what popular movements are able to do.

This meeting is not associated with any form of ideology. You do not work with ideas; you work with realities such as those I just mentioned and many others that you have told me about... you work hard, on the front line and have the calluses to prove it. You

¹ Original version: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2014/october/index.html>

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fight for real lives and real people! We want your voice to be heard, a voice that is too often ignored. Perhaps because your message is inconvenient or your cries make others feel uncomfortable, perhaps because they fear the changes you call for; but without you, without listening to the most marginalised voices, the well-intentioned proposals presented at international conferences remain trapped in the realm of ideas and this is my project, to make your voice heard.

The scandal of poverty cannot be resolved by containment strategies that simply serve to pacify the poor, converting them into docile and inoffensive beings. It is so sad when supposed acts of great altruism restrict those they are designed to help to a merely passive role, deny them any role at all or, worse still, are actually motivated by personal gain and ambition: Jesus would call them hypocritical. Yet how wonderful is it, in turn, when we see movements arising from the communities themselves, especially from their poorest or youngest members. Only then do the winds of change truly begin to stir, breathing real hope into the promise of a better world. That these winds might transform into a mighty gale of hope. This is my desire.

This meeting responds to a very specific need, something that any father or mother would want for their children; something that should be within everyone's reach but sadly, as we can see today, is becoming a distant hope for too many: the right to land, housing and work. When I speak about this, for some people it will sound like the pope is a communist.

Yet they fail to see that love for the poor is at the very heart of the Gospel. Land, housing and work, the things for which you fight, are sacred rights. It is completely natural that we should call for access to these rights; they are enshrined in the social doctrine of the Church. I would now like to focus in a bit more depth on each of the concepts on which this meeting is based.

Firstly, Land. At the very beginning of creation, God created man to care for his work, asking him to nurture and protect all He created. I see there are dozens of peasants here today and I want to thank them for caring for the land, cultivating it and doing this as a community. I am greatly concerned by the disappearance of so many of our rural brothers and sisters who are forced off their land, but not by war or natural disaster. Land grabbing, deforestation, the appropriation of water or the use of unsuitable chemical pesticides are just some of the evils that drive men and women off their native land. This painful separation that due to their deep bond with the land is not just physical but also existential and spiritual, is having a devastating effect on rural communities and their distinctive ways of life, bringing them to the point of extinction.

The other dimension of the already global process is hunger. When financial speculation sets food prices, as if food were just another material asset, millions of people starve and die. Yet tonnes of food is wasted and thrown away. It is a genuine scandal. The existence of hunger is criminal; access to food is a fundamental right. I

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know that some of you are calling for agrarian reform to solve some of these problems and let me tell you that in certain countries, and here I quote from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, "Agrarian reform is a moral obligation more than a political necessity" (CSDC, 300).

This is not just something I believe, it is there in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Please keep on fighting for the dignity of rural families, for water, for life and for the fruits of the earth to be shared by all.

Secondly, housing. I have said it before and I will say it again: a house for each family. We should never forget that Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room at the inn and that his family were forced to abandon their home and escape to Egypt, fleeing from Herod. Today, there are countless families without a home; families who have never had one or who have lost their home for various reasons. Family and housing go hand in hand. Yet, what's more, for a house to be a home there must be an element of community: this is your neighbourhood... and it is precisely within the neighbourhood where the extended family of all humanity takes root, from the most immediate bonds to living in harmony with your neighbour. Today we live in vast cities; those proud, even vain, demonstrations of our great modernity. Cities that offer uncountable pleasures and benefits for a happy minority... but which deny basic housing to thousands of fellow human beings, brothers and sisters and even children, who are elegantly referred to as "persons in street situation". It is curious how the world of injustices seems to be so full of euphemisms. Words are stripped of their true weight and reality is presented through the filter of euphemism. A human being, a marginalised person, an excluded person, a person suffering inhumane conditions and hunger, is a person in a street situation: an elegant term would you not agree? Of course there always exceptions but, generally speaking, I urge you to seek out the crime behind any euphemism.

We live in cities built of skyscrapers and shopping centres, with property being traded from owner to owner... yet a huge part of the city is pushed out to marginalised, peripheral areas. It is so painful to hear of poor neighbourhoods being marginalised or, worse still, eradicated. The images of forced evictions, bulldozers tearing down homes are so cruel; they seem like images of war. This is what is happening in our world today.

You will have seen many values being kept alive in your own neighbourhoods that have long been forgotten in wealthy urban centres. Communities like yours are blessed with a rich popular culture: public spaces are not just used to get from A to B but are treated as an extension of the home, a place where bonds are formed with neighbours. How beautiful are cities which have overcome that unhealthy sense of mistrust and welcome all different types of people, making this integration a new factor of development. How attractive are cities that, even down to their architectural design, are full of interconnecting and related spaces, fostering the integration of

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difference. This is why neither eradication nor marginalisation is the answer: the future of our cities lies in urban integration. This process must not only immediately replace eradication but also all those projects that attempt to gloss over poor neighbourhoods, polish up the peripheries and cover up social wounds instead of curing them by promoting genuine and respectful integration. It is as if architecture is being used to paint a thick layer of make-up over the true complexion of our cities. The fight must go on for all families to have a home and for all neighbourhoods to have suitable infrastructure (sewers, light, gas, tarmac roads and then: schools, hospitals or primary care centres, sports clubs and all those things that create links and bond people together, and I'll say it again; access to healthcare, education and tenant security.

Thirdly, work. There is absolutely no worse material poverty than that which denies us the right to earn a living and the dignity of work. Youth unemployment and informal or nonexistent worker rights are not inevitable, they are the result of a pre-selected social option, of an economic system that puts profit above people, if the profit is economic, above humanity or above people, they are the consequences of a throwaway culture in which human beings are seen as consumable goods that can be used and cast aside.

Today, the phenomenon of exploitation and oppression has taken on a new dimension, a graphic and hard edge of social injustice; those who are unable to integrate or are excluded from society are seen as "surplus to requirements". This is what I mean by a throwaway culture, in fact a new thought on this phenomenon has just occurred to me. This culture emerges when we put the false idol of money at the centre of our economic system instead of actual people. Human beings, the image of God, created to master and care for all He created, must be at the centre of any economic or social system. It is when men and women are replaced in this role by the false idol of money that this mutation of values occurs.

A lesson from around the year 1200 comes to mind to illustrate this point. A Rabi, explaining the story of the tower of Babel to his congregation, described the huge amount of work that went into building the tower; bricks needed to be made and to do this, mud and straw had to be collected, moulded together and cut into squares. Then the bricks had to be dried and fired and, when cool, carried to the top of the tower to keep building it higher and higher.

If a brick was dropped, which were very costly after all this work, it was treated as a national tragedy and the worker who dropped the brick was dismissed, punished or suffered who knows what fate. However, if a worker fell no one even blinked. This is a sign of enslavement to the false idol of money, from a tale told by a Rabi in 1200, echoing the dangers of what we are seeing today.

And as for discarding, we also need to be a bit more aware of what is happening in our society. I have said all this before and it is written in the Evangelii Gaudium. In today's

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world, the declining birth rates in many countries point to the fact that the children are being discarded, discarded due to a lack of food or killed before they are even born.

The elderly are also discarded for having no purpose, no productive value –neither the elderly nor children produce anything–, so under more or less sophisticated systems they are slowly abandoned. In addition, as some kind of balance needs to be recovered in the midst of this crisis, a third, very painful, case is being seen: the discarding of the young. Millions of young people, I cannot give a specific number as I am not sure what it would be and the figure I have read seems a little exaggerated, but millions of young people are discarded from work, becoming unemployed.

In Europe, where the figures are clearer, and specifically here in Italy, youth unemployment currently stands at 40%; we all know that 40% of all young people means an entire generation discarded in an attempt to balance the system. In other European countries, this figure has exceeded 50%, in Italy it hit 50% and in the south 60%. These figures are a clear indication of discard; discard of children and of the elderly, who produce nothing, and the sacrifice of a whole generation of young people, discarding the youth, in order to shore up and stabilise a system which revolves around the false idol of money instead of human beings.

Despite all this, despite this throwaway culture, this culture of castoffs, so many of you, excluded workers, discarded by this system, have gone about creating your own work with things that seem like they have nothing left to give.... but you, with the artisanal skills God has given you... with your constant search, your solidarity, your community approach and your popular economy, are creating new work, a new system. And let me say this; not only is this work, it is poetry. Thank you.

All workers, whether within the traditional system of salaried work or not, have the right to a dignified wage, to social welfare and to receive a pension. Here today we have rubbish collectors, recyclers, street vendors, garment makers, craftsmen and women, fishermen and women, peasants, builders, miners, workers from employee-owned companies and members of all kinds of cooperatives related to traditional crafts who are denied basic worker rights, the right to form trade unions or the right to a fair and stable wage. Today I want to add my voice to yours and join you in your fight.

At this meeting, we have also talked about Peace and Environmental Protection. And rightly so: there can be no land, no housing and no jobs if there is no peace and if we destroy the planet. These issues are so important that communities and popular movements must have a voice in the debate. These matters cannot be left in the hands of our political leaders. All communities on this planet, all men and women of good faith should act to defend these precious gifts: peace and nature. Our sister Mother Earth as Francis of Assisi said.

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I recently said, and I'll repeat here today, that we are living in the midst of a piecemeal Third World War. There are economic systems that must make war in order to survive. Weapons are made and sold and our economies are kept afloat by sacrificing men and women at the feet of the false idol of money. Not a thought is spared for the children starving in refugee camps or the forced displacements or the homes that get destroyed or the countless lives that are cut short. So much suffering, destruction and pain. Today, my dear brothers and sisters, the call for peace rings out from all corners of the world, from all communities, in every heart and popular movement: No more war!

An economic system that revolves around the false idol of money also plunders nature to sustain its innate rhythm of frantic consumption. The devastating effects of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation are already being seen in huge natural disasters and you, the poor, are those who suffer the most. Those living near the coast in precarious housing or who are so economically vulnerable that they lose everything when a natural disaster hits. Brothers and sisters, creation is not something that we own, which we can use as we please; and it is much less something that belongs to others, to just a select few. Creation is a gift, a precious gift that God gave to us to look after, to use for the good of everyone and always with the greatest respect and gratitude. Those of you who know I am preparing an encyclical about protecting the Environment: rest assured that your concerns will be addressed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the letters I have received from members of La Via Campesina, La Federación de Cartoneros and from so many other brothers and sisters on this topic.

We talk about land, jobs and housing... about working towards peace and caring for the Environment. Yet why do we continue to see dignified work being eradicated, families being evicted from their homes and peasants from their land, wars being waged and nature being abused? Because the system has removed human beings, individual people, from its centre and replaced them with something else. Because it has been conquered by an idolatrous cult of money. Because of the globalisation of indifference: why should I care about what happens to others, I just look out for my own. Because the world has forgotten about God, the Father. By leaving God aside it has become an orphan.

Some of you believe that this system is already starting to collapse. We have to change it, we have to return human dignity to its centre so the alternative social structures that we need can be built on these foundations. We must take a brave, yet intelligent, approach to this task. Tenacious yet never fanatic. Passionate yet never violent. And between us all, we must face conflicts without getting drawn into them, seeking to always resolve tensions to reach a higher plane of unity, peace and justice. As Christians, we have a very beautiful resource: an action plan, a guide, which we could even say is revolutionary. I strongly recommend you read it, that you read the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 and Luke chapter 6 (cf. Mt 5, 3 and Lc 6, 20) and the

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passage from Matthew 25. As I said to a young audience in Rio de Janeiro, these two readings provide us with a plan for action.

I know that we have among us today people of different religions, trades, ideas, cultures, countries and continents. We are nurturing a culture of unity that is so different from the culture of xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance that we so often see. At this meeting of cultures, made possible by those who have been excluded from society, the whole does not overshadow the individual parts. This brings to mind the figure of a polyhedron; a geometrical shape with many different faces. The polyhedron reflects the fusion of different factions which preserve their individual nature while forming part of the whole. Nothing is dissolved, nothing is destroyed and nothing dominates; everything is integrated. Today we are also looking for that synthesis between the local and the global. I know you work day after day in your immediate and tangible surroundings, in your region, your neighbourhood or your workplace; however, I also invite you to continue seeking out a broader perspective so our dreams can soar higher and encompass the whole.

This is why the proposals that some of you have shared with me are so very important. Proposals that call for these movements, these experiences of solidarity that grow from the bottom up, from below the very ground of the earth, to come together, become more organised and continue meeting as you have all done today. Yet take care to not restrict this movement within inflexible structures, this is why I say meet, and even greater care that it is not absorbed, directed or dominated by a single faction; free movements should have their own individual dynamics, what we need to do is aim to walk side by side. Today we have met in the Old Synod Hall, there is now a new one, and the word synod means precisely "to walk together": let's reflect on this as a symbol of the process that you have initiated and that you are driving forward together.

Popular movements express an urgent need to revitalise our democracies, which are all too often hijacked by innumerable forces. It is impossible to image a future for a society without major participation from the great majorities and this leading role goes beyond the logical procedures of formal democracy. The vision of a world of long-lasting peace and justice requires that we move away from paternalistic welfare systems and create new forms of participation that include popular movements. We need to revitalise the structures of local, national and international governance with a powerful torrent of moral energy created by including the excluded in the construction of a shared future. This must be done in a constructive manner, without resentment, with love.

I am wholeheartedly with you, step by step, along this path. Let's say together, from the heart: No family without a home, no peasant without land, no worker without rights, no person without the dignity of work.

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Dear brothers and sisters, continue the fight, it is for the benefit of us all. It is a blessing for all humanity. I will leave you with a token, a gift with my blessing, some rosaries made by craftsmen and women, rubbish collectors and workers from the popular economy of Latin America.

And as I accompany you I will pray for you all, I will pray with you and I will ask God our Father to watch over you and to bless you, to fill you with His love and to travel this path with you, giving you the strength you need to walk straight and true: this strength is hope, a hope that does not deceive, thank you. ☺