



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 26 August 2009

Safeguarding of Creation

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have almost reached the end of August, which for many means the end of the summer holidays. As we pick up our usual routine, how could we not thank God for the precious gift of creation which we so enjoy, and not only during our holidays! The various phenomena of environmental degradation and natural disasters which, unfortunately, are often reported in the news remind us of the urgent need to respect nature as we should, recovering and appreciating a correct relationship with the environment in every day life. A new sensitivity to these topics that justly give rise to concern on the part of the Authorities and of public opinion is developing and is expressed in the increasing number of meetings, also at the international level.

The Earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator who, in designing its intrinsic order, has given us bearings that guide us as stewards of his creation. Precisely from within this framework, the Church considers matters concerning the environment and its protection intimately linked to the theme of integral human development. In my recent Encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, I referred more than once to such questions, recalling the "pressing moral need for renewed solidarity" (n. 49) not only between countries but also between individuals, since the natural environment is given by God to everyone, and our use of it entails a personal responsibility towards humanity as a whole, and in particular towards the poor and towards future generations (cf. n. 48). Bearing in mind our common responsibility for creation (cf. n. 51), the Church is not only committed to promoting the

protection of land, water and air as gifts of the Creator destined to everyone but above all she invites others and works herself to protect mankind from self-destruction. In fact, "when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits" (*ibid.*). Is it not true that an irresponsible use of creation begins precisely where God is marginalized or even denied? If the relationship between human creatures and the Creator is forgotten, matter is reduced to a selfish possession, man becomes the "last word", and the purpose of human existence is reduced to a scramble for the maximum number of possessions possible.

The created world, structured in an intelligent way by God, is entrusted to our responsibility and though we are able to analyze it and transform it we cannot consider ourselves creation's absolute master. We are called, rather, to exercise responsible stewardship of creation, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits, and to cultivate it, finding the resources necessary for every one to live with dignity. Through the help of nature itself and through hard work and creativity, humanity is indeed capable of carrying out its grave duty to hand on the earth to future generations so that they too, in turn, will be able to inhabit it worthily and continue to cultivate it (cf. n. 50). For this to happen, it is essential to develop "that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God" (*Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, n. 7), recognizing that we all come from God and that we are all journeying towards him. How important it is then, that the international community and individual governments send the right signals to their citizens to succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment! The economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations. The protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate, oblige all international leaders to act jointly respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the world (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 50). Together we can build an integral human development beneficial for all peoples, present and future, a development inspired by the values of charity in truth. For this to happen it is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater, and shared, acceptance of responsibility for creation: this is demanded not only by environmental factors, but also by the scandal of hunger and human misery.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us now give thanks to the Lord and make our own the words of St Francis found in "The Canticle of All Creatures":

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,

All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,...

So says St Francis. We, too, wish to pray and live in the spirit of these words.

To special groups:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including the many altar servers, school pupils and choristers.

The summer holidays have given us all the opportunity to thank God for the precious gift of creation. Taking up this theme, I wish to reflect today upon the relationship between the Creator and ourselves as guardians of his creation. In so doing I also wish to offer my support to leaders of governments and international agencies who soon will meet at the United Nations to discuss the urgent issue of climate change.

The Earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator who, in designing its intrinsic order, has given us guidelines that assist us as stewards of his creation. Precisely from within this framework, the Church considers that matters concerning the environment and its protection are intimately linked with integral human development. In my recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, I referred to such questions recalling the "pressing moral need for renewed solidarity" (no. 49) not only between countries but also between individuals, since the natural environment is given by God to everyone, and so our use of it entails a personal responsibility towards humanity as a whole, particularly towards the poor and towards future generations (cf. no. 48).

How important it is then, that the international community and individual governments send the right signals to their citizens and succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment! The economic and social costs of using up shared resources must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations. The protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate, oblige all leaders to act jointly, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the world (cf. no. 50). Together we can build an integral human development beneficial for all peoples, present and future, a development inspired by the values of charity in truth. For this to happen it is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater, and shared, acceptance of responsibility for creation: this is demanded not only by environmental factors, but also by the scandal of hunger and human misery.

With these sentiments I wish to encourage all the participants in the United Nations summit to enter into their discussions constructively and with generous courage. Indeed, we are all called to exercise responsible stewardship of creation, to use resources in such a way that every individual and community can live with dignity, and to develop "that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God" (*Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 7)! Thank you.

I now address the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. In the next few days the liturgy commemorates two great Saints, St Monica and St Augustine, united on earth by kinship and in Heaven by the same destiny of glory. May their example impel you, *young people*, to a sincere and enthusiastic search for evangelical Truth; may it reveal to you, *sick people*, the redemptive value of suffering offered to God in union with the sacrifice of the Cross; may it sustain you, dear *newlyweds*, in the generous witness of God's freely given love.

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