



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 3rd WORLD MEETING OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS Paul VI

Audience Hall

Saturday, 5 November 2016 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Brothers and sisters, good evening!

In this, our third meeting, we have voiced the same thirst, the thirst for justice, and the same cry: land, work and housing for all.

I thank the delegates who have come from the urban, rural and working peripheries of the five continents – from over sixty countries - to discuss once more how to defend these rights that brought us here. I thank the bishops who accompanied them, and the thousands of Italians and Europeans who joined us today for the conclusion of this meeting. I also thank the observers and young people engaged in public life who came quietly to listen and to learn. How much hope I have in young people! I am likewise grateful to you, Cardinal Turkson, for the work your dicastery does, and I would like to mention the contribution of the former President of Uruguay, José Mujica, who is present here.

At [our last meeting, in Bolivia](#), with a majority of Latin Americans, we spoke of the need for change, a change of structures, for the sake of a decent life. We also spoke of how you, the popular movements, are sowers of change, promoters of a process involving millions of actions, great and small, creatively intertwined like words in a poem; that is why I wanted to call you “social poets”. We also listed three tasks essential for progressing towards a humane alternative to the globalization of indifference: (1) placing the economy at the service of peoples; (2) working for peace and justice; and (3) defending Mother Earth.

That day, a *cartonera* and a *campesino* read out the conclusions, the ten points of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where the meaning of the word “change” was filled out. It was linked to your basic demands: dignified employment for those excluded from the labour market; land for *campesinos* and the native peoples; housing for homeless families; urban integration for poorer neighbourhoods; the elimination of discrimination, violence against women and other new forms of enslavement; an end to all wars, organized crime and repression; freedom of expression and

democratic communication; putting science and technology at the service of peoples. We also heard your commitment to embracing a life project that rejects consumerism and recovers solidarity, mutual love and respect for nature as essential values. What you are demanding is the happiness of “living well”, not that deceptive and selfish ideal embodied in the phrase “living the good life”.

Those of us here today, with our varied origins, beliefs and ideas, may not be agreed on everything, for surely we think differently about many issues, but certainly we agree on these points.

I was also aware of the meetings and workshops held in different countries, where many discussions took place in the light of each community's situation. That is very important, because real solutions to today's problems are not going to emerge from one, three or even a thousand conferences. They need to be the fruit of a collective discernment that matures on the ground, alongside our brothers and sisters, a discernment that becomes transformative action “in accordance with places, times and persons”, as Saint Ignatius would say. Otherwise, we run the risk of abstraction, of those “declarationist nominalisms that are fine phrases but that are not able to sustain the lives of our communities” (*Letter to the President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, 19 March 2016). Slogans. A globalizing ideological colonialism attempts to impose supracultural recipes that fail to respect the identity of peoples. You yourselves take another route, which is both local and universal. A route that reminds me of how Jesus asked for the crowd to be organized in groups of fifty each, in order to distribute the bread (cf. *Homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi*, Buenos Aires, 12 June 2004).

Recently we were able to view the video that you presented as a way of concluding this third Meeting. We saw your faces in the debates about what to do about the “inequality that spawns violence”. So many proposals, so much creativity, so much hope in your voices: you, who perhaps have the most reasons to complain, to get caught up in conflicts, to fall into the temptation of negativity. Yet you look to the future, you reflect, you discuss, you propose and you act. I congratulate you, I accompany you and I ask you to continue to blaze trails and to keep fighting. This gives me strength; this gives all of us strength. I believe that this dialogue of ours, which is joined to the efforts of all those millions of people who work daily for justice throughout the world, is taking root.

I would like to touch on some more specific issues, the ones I received from you. They have made me think, and now I hand them back to you.

First: terror and walls.

That slow germination which, like every process of gestation, takes time, is threatened by the rapidity of a destructive mechanism working against it. There are powerful forces capable of

neutralizing this evolving process of change aimed at displacing the primacy of money and once again putting human beings, men and women, at the centre. That “invisible thread” we talked about in Bolivia, that unjust structure linking all the forms of exclusion that you experience, can stiffen and become a whip, an existential whip that, as in the Egypt of the Old Testament, enslaves and robs of freedom. Some it lashes mercilessly, while constantly threatening others, in order to herd everyone, like cattle, to wherever the god of money chooses.

What governs then? Money. How does it govern? With the whip of fear, of inequality, of economic, social, cultural and military violence, which spawns ever greater violence in a seemingly unending downward spiral. So much pain and so much fear! There is – I said not long ago – a basic terrorism that is born of the overall control of money worldwide and strikes at humanity as a whole. That basic terrorism feeds derivative forms of terrorism like narcoterrorism, state terrorism and what some wrongly term ethnic or religious terrorism, even though no people, no religion, is terrorist. Certainly, there are small fundamentalist groups on all sides. But terrorism begins when “you drive out the marvel of creation, man and woman, and put money in their place” ([*Press Conference on the Return Flight from the Apostolic Journey to Poland*](#), 31 July 2016). That system is terroristic.

Almost a hundred years ago, Pius XI foresaw the growth of a global economic dictatorship that he called “international imperialism of finance” ([*Quadragesimo Anno*](#), 15 May 1931, 109). That was in 1931! We are in this audience hall named after Paul VI, and it was Paul VI who, some fifty years ago, denounced the “new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level” ([*Octogesima Adveniens*](#), 14 May 1971, 44). They are harsh yet accurate words spoken by my predecessors, who warned us about what was to come. The Church and the prophets for millennia have been saying things that we find scandalous when the Pope repeats them today, in a time when the phenomenon has reached unprecedented proportions. The entire social doctrine of the Church and the magisterium of my predecessors rejects the idolatry of money that reigns rather than serves, that tyrannizes and terrorizes humanity.

No tyranny can last without exploiting our fears. This is key. Consequently, all tyranny is a form of terrorism. And when that terror, which has been sown in the outskirts, whether by massacres, plundering, oppression and injustice, explodes in the centres with different forms of violence, even with despicable and cowardly attacks, citizens who still retain some rights are tempted by the false security of physical and social walls. Walls that enclose some and leave others out. Some citizens behind walls, terrorized. Others excluded, dispossessed, and even more terrorized. Is this the life that God our Father desires for his children?

Fear then is fed, manipulated... Because fear is not only good business for those who trade in weapons and death, it weakens us, throws us off balance, breaks down our psychological and spiritual defences, anaesthetizes us to the sufferings of others, and in the end makes us cruel. When we hear of people exulting in the death of a young person who had perhaps lost his way,

when we see that war is preferred to peace, when we see the spread of xenophobia, when we realize that intolerant ideas are gaining ground, behind that burgeoning cruelty is the cold breath of fear. I ask you to pray for all those who are fearful. Let us pray that God will give them strength, and that in this Year of Mercy we can soften our hearts. Mercy is not easy; it is no easy thing... It takes courage. That is why Jesus tells us: “Do not be afraid” (*Mt 14:27*), for mercy is the best antidote to fear. It is much better than antidepressants and anxiety medication. It is much more effective than walls, grates, alarms and weapons. And it is free: it is a gift from God.

Dear brothers and sisters: all walls collapse. All of them. Let us not be deceived. As you have said, “we should continue working to build bridges between peoples, bridges which enable us to break down the walls of exclusion and exploitation” (*Final Document of the II World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 11 July 2015, Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia). Let us confront terror with love.

The second point I would like to mention is: love and bridges.

On a day like today, a Sabbath, Jesus did two things that, as the Gospel tells us, precipitated the conspiracy to kill him. He was walking with his disciples through a field, a field of grain. The disciples were hungry and ate the heads of grain. Nothing is said to us about the “owner” of that field... underlying [the account] is the universal destination of goods. One thing is certain: faced with hunger, Jesus set the dignity of the children of God over a rigid, casuistic and self-serving interpretation of the rules. When the doctors of the law complained with hypocritical indignation, Jesus reminded them that God desires love, not sacrifice, and explained to them that the Sabbath was made for human beings and not human beings for the Sabbath (cf. *Mk 2:27*). He confronted their hypocritical and smug thinking with the humble understanding of the heart (cf. *Homily at the I Congress of Evangelization of Culture*, Buenos Aires, 3 November 2006), which always puts people first and refuses to allow certain mindsets to obstruct its freedom to live, love and serve our neighbour.

And then that same day, Jesus did something “worse”, something that irritated even more the hypocrites and the prideful who were watching him, looking for some excuse to trap him. He cured a man’s withered hand. The hand, that powerful symbol of work, of labour. Jesus restored that man’s ability to work, and thereby restored his dignity. How many withered hands are there, how many persons deprived of the dignity of work, because the hypocrites, in order to defend unjust systems, are opposed to their being healed. Sometimes I think that when you, the organized poor, create your own work – establishing a cooperative, restoring a ruined factory, recycling the refuse of the consumer society, braving the elements in order to sell your wares in a public square, reclaiming a parcel of farm land to feed the hungry – whenever you do these things, you are imitating Jesus, because you are trying to heal, even if minimally and provisionally, that atrophy of the dominant socio-economic system, which is unemployment. I am not surprised that at times you find yourselves being watched or persecuted, nor am I surprised that the proud have no interest in what you are saying.

That Sabbath, Jesus put his life on the line, because after he healed that hand, the Pharisees and the Herodians (*Mk 3:6*), two rival parties who feared the people and the Roman Empire, began to scheme and plot to kill him. I know that many of you lay your own lives on the line. I know – and I want to say this – that some are not here today because they did lay down their lives... But there is no greater love than to give one's life. That is what Jesus teaches us.

The three Ts [*tierra, techo, trabajo*], that cry of yours which I make my own, has a touch of that understanding which is humble, yet strong and healing. The bridge-project of peoples as opposed to the wall-project of money. The project that aims at integral human development. Some of you know that our friend Cardinal Turkson now heads the dicastery with that name: Integral Human Development. The opposite of development, we can say, is atrophy, paralysis. We have to help heal the world of its moral atrophy. This atrophied system can offer a number of cosmetic implants that are not true development: economic growth, technical advances, greater “efficiency” in producing products to be bought, used and discarded, engulfing us all in a whirlwind of refuse... But this kind of world does not allow the development of the human being in his integrity, a development that is not reduced to consumption or to the well-being of a few, but includes all peoples and individuals in their full dignity, enjoying as brothers and sisters the marvel of creation. That is the development we need: one that is human, integral, respectful of creation, respectful of this common home.

Another point is: bankruptcy and salvaging.

Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to share with you some reflections on two further issues that, together with the three Ts (land, work and housing) and integral ecology, were central to your discussions these last days and are central at this moment in history.

I know that you devoted a whole day to the drama of migrants, refugees and displaced persons. What are we to do in the face of this tragedy? In the dicastery Cardinal Turkson heads, there is a department concerned with those situations. I decided that, at least for the time being, that department would be directly under the Pope, because here we have a shameful situation that can only be described by a word that came spontaneously to my lips in Lampedusa: a disgrace.

There, and in Lesbos too, I could feel firsthand the suffering of so many families driven from their lands for economic reasons or acts of violence of every kind, crowds of the displaced, people who have endured the painful experience of being uprooted from their homeland. As I said before the leaders of the entire world, this is the result of an unjust socio-economic system and of armed conflicts that were neither sought nor caused by those who suffer being uprooted from their native soil, but by many of those who now refuse to receive them.

I echo the words of my brother, Archbishop Ieronymos of Greece: “Anyone who looks into the eyes of those small children we met in the refugee camps can immediately recognize, in its

entirety, the ‘bankruptcy’ of humanity” (*Address in the Moria Refugee Camp*, Lesvos, 16 April 2016). What is going on in the world today that, when a bank fails, scandalous sums of money suddenly appear to save it, but before this bankruptcy of humanity not even a thousandth part is allotted to save those brothers and sisters who suffer so greatly? The Mediterranean has turned into a cemetery, and not only the Mediterranean... there are so many cemeteries alongside the walls, walls drenched in innocent blood. During the days of this Meeting, I asked in the video: How many people have died in the Mediterranean?

Fear hardens the heart and turns into a callousness that is blind to the blood, the pain, the faces of other people. As my brother, Patriarch Bartholomew, has said: “Those who are afraid of you have not looked you in the eye. Those who are afraid of you have not seen your faces. Those who are afraid of you do not see your children. They forget that dignity and freedom transcend fear and division. They forget that migration is not an issue for the Middle East and Northern Africa, for Europe and Greece. It is an issue for the world” (*Address in the Moria Refugee Camp*, Lesvos, 16 April 2016).

To be sure, it is a problem for the world. No one should be forced to flee from his or her country, but the evil is doubled when, in these terrible circumstances, migrants fall into the clutches of human traffickers in order to cross borders. It is tripled if, arriving in a land where they hoped to have a better future, they are treated with contempt, exploited and even enslaved. This can be seen on any corner in hundreds of cities. Or else, they simply are not allowed to enter.

I ask you to do everything you can. Never forget that Jesus, Mary and Joseph also experienced the dramatic plight of refugees. I ask you to show that special solidarity that exists between people who have suffered. You have shown that you can rescue factories from bankruptcy, recycle other people’s refuse, create jobs, work the land, build housing, integrate segregated barrios and tirelessly plead, like the widow in the Gospel, for justice (cf. *Lk 18:1-8*). Perhaps by your example and your persistence, some states and international agencies may open their eyes and take suitable measures to receive and fully integrate all those who for one reason or another seek refuge far from home. And to confront the deeper reasons why thousands of men, women and children are daily driven from their native land.

Giving example and advocacy are ways of engaging in political life, and this brings me to the second major topic that you discussed in your meeting: the relationship between a people and democracy. This relationship should be natural and fluid, but it risks being deformed to the point of being unrecognizable. The breach between the peoples and our current forms of democracy is growing ever greater, due to the enormous power of the financial and media sectors that would seem to dominate them. Popular movements, I know, are not political parties, and I would say that, in great measure, this is what makes them so valuable, since they express a distinct, dynamic and vital form of social participation in public life. But do not be afraid to get involved in the great discussions, in politics with a capital P, and once again I quote Paul VI: “Politics are a

demanding manner – but not the only one – of living the Christian commitment to the service of others” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 14 May 1971, 46). Or that phrase I like to repeat but I can never remember whether it is from Paul VI or Pius XII: “Politics is one of the highest forms of charity, of love”.

I would like to point to two risks involved in the relationship between popular movements and politics: the risk of being put in a straitjacket and the risk of being corrupted.

First, don’t let yourselves get put in a straitjacket, because some people say: cooperatives, canteens, agro-ecological gardens, small businesses, drawing up welfare programmes... all that is fine. As long as you are confined by the straitjacket of “social policies”, as long as you don’t question economic policy or politics with a P, you are tolerated. The idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a project which can bring people back together, sometimes strikes me as a kind of brightly-painted dust bin to contain the refuse of the system. But if, on the basis of your being rooted alongside your neighbours, your daily experiences and your barrios and regions, your organization of community work, your one-on-one relationships, you dare to question “macro-relations”, when you protest, when you lift your voice and presume to point out to the powerful a more integral approach, then you become intolerable. You become intolerable because you are casting off the straitjacket and entering the realm of the great decisions that some presume to monopolize in small castes. Thus, democracy atrophies, turns into a slogan, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future.

As organizations of the excluded and many organizations from other sectors of society, you are called to revitalize and recast the democracies, which are experiencing a genuine crisis. Do not fall into the temptation of the straitjacket, which reduces you to being extras off-stage, or worse, to mere administrators of existing misery. In these times of paralysis, disorientation and destructive formulas, the active participation of peoples who seek the common good can triumph, with God’s help, over the false prophets who exploit fear and despair, who peddle magic formulas of hatred and callousness, or a selfish prosperity and an illusory security.

We know that “as long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems, or for that matter, any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 202). That is why I have said and I now repeat: “The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of the great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their capacity to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change” (*Address at the II World Meeting of Popular Movements*, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9 July 2015). The Church too, can and must, without claiming a monopoly on truth, speak out and act, especially in

the face of “situations of deep hurt and dramatic suffering, in which values, ethics, the social sciences and faith all enter into play” (*Address to the Judges’ Summit on Human Trafficking and Organized Crime*, Vatican, 3 June 2016). This was the first risk: the risk of the straitjacket, and the encouragement to get involved in high-level politics.

The second risk, I said, is that of being corrupted. Just as politics is not an affair of “politicians”, corruption is not a vice limited to political life. There is corruption in politics, there is corruption in the business world, there is corruption in the communications media, there is corruption in the churches, but also there is corruption in the social organizations and popular movements. It is correct to say that there is a “naturalized” corruption in some spheres of economic life, particularly financial activity, which gets less attention in the press than corruption directly linked to social and political life. It is right to say that cases of corruption are frequently manipulated with evil intentions. But it is also right to make clear that those who have opted for a life of service have a further obligation, in addition to the honesty with which any person must act in life. The bar is set higher. One has to live his or her vocation to service with a strong sense of austerity and humility. This holds true for politicians, but it is also true for social leaders and for ourselves, religious leaders. I used the word “austerity”. I would like to clarify what I mean by that word. It can be equivocal. Moral austerity, austerity in one’s way of living, austerity in how I go about my life, and in my family. Moral and human austerity. Because in a more scientific field, that of the economic sciences if you will, or the sciences of the market, austerity is a synonym of adjustment. That is not what I’m talking about.

I would advise any person who is unduly concerned with material things or with appearances, who likes money, rich banquets, sumptuous mansions, expensive clothes, luxury cars, to think about where their heart is, and to pray that God will free them from these attachments. But to paraphrase the Latin American former President who is present, whoever has a taste for such things, please, should not get involved in politics, not get involved in social organizations or popular movements, because they will cause great harm to themselves and their neighbour, and will tarnish the noble cause they want to promote. Nor should such a person enter the seminary.

Faced with the temptation of corruption, there is no better antidote than austerity: moral and personal austerity. What is more, to practice austerity is to preach by example. I ask you not to underestimate the value of example, for it is more powerful than a thousand words, a thousand pamphlets, a thousand likes or re-tweets, a thousand YouTube videos. The example of an austere life of service to one’s neighbour is the best way to promote the common good and the bridge-project of the 3Ts. I urge leaders not to tire of practising such moral and personal austerity, and I ask everyone to require of leaders that austerity which – for that matter – will bring them much happiness.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Corruption, arrogance and public display by leaders increases collective unbelief and a sense of abandonment, and feeds the mechanism of fear that sustains that evil system.

I would like, in conclusion, to ask you to continue combating fear by a life of service, solidarity and humility on behalf of peoples, and especially those who suffer most. You will make lots of mistakes – we all make mistakes – but if we persevere in this journey, sooner rather than later we are going to see it bear fruit. And I insist that, against terror, the best antidote is love. Love heals everything. Some of you know that, following the Synod on the Family, I wrote a document entitled *Amoris Laetitia*. The joy of love. A document on love in each family, but also in that family which is the barrio, the community, the people, humanity. One of you asked me to distribute a booklet with part of the fourth chapter of that document. I believe that they are going to hand it out as you leave. Go, then, with my blessing. There you have some “helpful tips” for practicing the greatest of the commandments of Jesus.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, I quote the late African-American leader, Martin Luther King, who constantly opted for fraternal love, even amid the worst persecutions and indignities. I want to share his words with you: “When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system... Hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you and you hit me back and so on, you see, that goes on ad infinitum. It just never ends. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that’s the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil”. He said this in 1957 (No. 118, *Sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, 17 November 1957*).

Once more, I thank you for your work and your presence here. I ask God our Father to accompany you and bless you, to fill you with his love and to watch over you along the way. May he grant you in abundance that strength which keeps us going and gives us courage to cut off the chains of hate: that strength is hope. I ask you, please, to pray for me, and those who cannot pray, they already know this, to think kindly of me and wish me well. Thank you.