

Vatican Radio translation of the Holy Father's  
Catechesis on June 5, 2013: "Environment, Creation,  
Relationships and a Culture of Waste"

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I want to focus on the issue of the environment, which I have already spoken of on several occasions. Today we also mark World Environment Day, sponsored by the United Nations, which sends a strong reminder of the need to eliminate the waste and disposal of food.

When we talk about the environment, about creation, my thoughts turn to the first pages of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, which states that God placed man and woman on earth to cultivate and care for it (cf. 2:15). And the question comes to my mind: What does cultivating and caring for the earth mean? Are we truly cultivating and caring for creation? Or are we exploiting and neglecting it? The verb "to cultivate" reminds me of the care that the farmer has for his land so that it bears fruit, and it is shared: how much attention, passion and dedication! Cultivating and caring for creation is God's indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of His project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone. Benedict XVI recalled several times that this task entrusted to us by God the Creator requires us to grasp the rhythm and logic of creation. But we are often driven by pride of domination, of possessions, manipulation, of exploitation; we do not "care" for it, we do not respect it, we do not consider it as a free gift that we must care for. We are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, listening to creation; thus we are no longer able to read what Benedict XVI calls "the rhythm of the love story of God and man." Why does this happen? Why do we think and live in a horizontal manner, we have moved away

from God, we no longer read His signs.

But to "cultivate and care" encompasses not only the relationship between us and the environment, between man and creation, it also regards human relationships. The Popes have spoken of human ecology, closely linked to environmental ecology. We are living in a time of crisis: we see this in the environment, but above all we see this in mankind. The human person is in danger: this is certain, the human person is in danger today, here is the urgency of human ecology! And it is a serious danger because the cause of the problem is not superficial but profound: it is not just a matter of economics, but of ethics and anthropology. The Church has stressed this several times, and many say, yes, that's right, it's true ... but the system continues as before, because it is dominated by the dynamics of an economy and finance that lack ethics. Man is not in charge today, money is in charge, money rules. God our Father did not give the task of caring for the earth to money, but to us, to men and women: we have this task! Instead, men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the "culture of waste." If you break a computer it is a tragedy, but poverty, the needs, the dramas of so many people end up becoming the norm. If on a winter's night, here nearby in Via Ottaviano, for example, a person dies, that is not news. If in so many parts of the world there are children who have nothing to eat, that's not news, it seems normal. It cannot be this way! Yet these things become the norm: that some homeless people die of cold on the streets is not news. In contrast, a ten-point drop on the stock markets of some cities, is a tragedy. A person dying is not news, but if the stock markets drop ten points it is a tragedy! Thus people are disposed of, as if they were trash.

This "culture of waste" tends to become the common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person is no

longer perceived as a primary value to be respected and protected, especially if poor or disabled, if not yet useful - such as the unborn child - or no longer needed - such as the elderly. This culture of waste has made us insensitive even to the waste and disposal of food, which is even more despicable when all over the world, unfortunately, many individuals and families are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Once our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any leftover food. Consumerism has led us to become used to an excess and daily waste of food, to which, at times, we are no longer able to give a just value, which goes well beyond mere economic parameters. We should all remember, however, that throwing food away is like stealing from the tables of the the poor, the hungry! I encourage everyone to reflect on the problem of thrown away and wasted food to identify ways and means that, by seriously addressing this issue, are a vehicle of solidarity and sharing with the needy.

A few days ago, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, we read the story of the miracle of the loaves: Jesus feeds the crowd with five loaves and two fishes. And the conclusion of the piece is important: " They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets" (Lk 9:17). Jesus asks his disciples not to throw anything away: no waste! There is this fact of twelve baskets: Why twelve? What does this mean? Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, which symbolically represent all people. And this tells us that when food is shared in a fair way, with solidarity, when no one is deprived, every community can meet the needs of the poorest. Human ecology and environmental ecology walk together.

So I would like us all to make a serious commitment to respect and protect creation, to be attentive to every person, to counter the culture of waste and disposable, to promote a

culture of solidarity and of encounter. Thank you.

## **Summary in English**

Dear Brothers and Sisters: Our Audience today coincides with World Environment Day, and so it is fitting to reflect on our responsibility to cultivate and care for the earth in accordance with God's command (cf. Gen 2:15). We are called not only to respect the natural environment, but also to show respect for, and solidarity with, all the members of our human family. These two dimensions are closely related; today we are suffering from a crisis which is not only about the just management of economic resources, but also about concern for human resources, for the needs of our brothers and sisters living in extreme poverty, and especially for the many children in our world lacking adequate education, health care and nutrition. Consumerism and a "culture of waste" have led some of us to tolerate the waste of precious resources, including food, while others are literally wasting away from hunger. I ask all of you to reflect on this grave ethical problem in a spirit of solidarity grounded in our common responsibility for the earth and for all our brothers and sisters in the human family.

## **Greeting:**

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Singapore and the United States. God bless you all!