



## SUMMER LETTER

### HOLIDAYS ILLUMINATED BY ENCYCLICAL LETTER

#### “LAUDATO SI”

Dear tourists and holidaymakers:

Presumably you come here to rest, perhaps overwhelmed by stress, crowds, or running away from the strain of everyday life. Whatever your reason, all of you surely come to have fun and to enjoy the beauty our land offers. "The best land on earth" for us. Here you will meet its kind-hearted people, its gorgeous heritage and its festivals and peculiar traditions; you may probably meet people from other countries or autonomous regions who speak different languages and with their different idiosyncrasies; you will be in new places and in landscapes which will be different from your usual habitat. These vacation features bring me back the subject matter and some questions that Pope Francis raises in his Encyclical letter "LAUDATO SI", related to the Creation and man, that I submit here for your consideration as they can be really useful and enlightening within the sphere of vacation. I will refer to his document with the numbers in brackets.

According to the Bible human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings... must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for "he commanded and they were created... and he set a law which cannot pass away" (Ps 148:5b-6) (LS 68). From the beginning the initial harmony was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations (66). Since then, our "common home", "sister earth," according to Francis of Assisi now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in man... is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. We have forgotten that our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (cf. Gen 2:7)" (2); There is an urgent need for a radical change in the conduct of

humanity and in the duty to care for our “common home” through little “daily actions” (211). We cannot just seek our personal interest and gain.

Likewise “we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: «by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory», and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31)” ( 69). But “if the human being «instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation... sets himself up in place of God... ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature »” (117). Man is just a “responsible stewardship” of creation (116).

“Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat... Ecology also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense”. And it calls natives and visitors, tourists or holidaymakers for greater attention and respect for local cultures (143). To achieve this, we must educate in “ecological virtues” (88) . I encourage you to do it and to live our culture, for example by living our festivals, our land’s special richness.

On human relationships, the Holy Father, warns us of the danger of falling into a misguided anthropocentrism and practical relativism. Indeed, “when human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative”. This logic leads to environmental degradation and social decay (122). Similarly, “the culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests... This same «use and throw away» logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary” (123). Unfortunately, these evils also appear in some leisure and tourism environments.

Some other tips may be good for our days off: Let’s avoid the consumerist vision which has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity (144), since a collective submission to advertising is prominent and there is a lack of individual, creative inventiveness. The Pope also insists that we should live soberly. "Actually, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them... Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can

offer" (223).

Another aspect to appreciate is that nature is "as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness (Sb 13.5)" (12). But individual's willingness and inner peace is closely related to ecology, states the Pope: "Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy... and leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence «must not be contrived but found, uncovered»" (225). This may be a good aim for this holiday! I invite you to rethink or rediscover these great ideas that the Pope offers.

He also tells us that "through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane". The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life... Water, oil, fire and colours are incorporated in our act of praise (235). "Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act" (236). Go, then, to Mass, especially on Sunday, a special day to meet with the Risen Lord, with the community who believe in Him, and a day of rest (237).

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, I will also encourage you to let yourselves become reconciled with God and His creatures, through the Sacrament of confession. You will find willing priests in parishes and places of worship. Feel the joy of forgiveness from God, of returning to Him , of rediscovering the meaning of life itself.

Finally, I would like to remember and pray for the workers of the tourism sector. With their effort, they make it possible for others to enjoy a lovely holiday; I would like to thank everybody in charge of the maintenance of public services for everything they do.

And lastly, I commend you all to Saint Mary, the Mother and Queen of everything created, so beloved and celebrated in our land. May her grant us the contemplative gaze of "Poverello of Assisi" who invites us to praise God for everything we have, we see and we enjoy: " Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures".

Happy summer!

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