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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the Study Day on Water organized by the FAO in Madrid (13 December 2018)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father to participants in the Study Day on Water organized by the FAO on the theme: “Water, agriculture and food: let us build tomorrow”, held in Madrid today at the *Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería Agronómica, Alimentaria y de Biosistemas*, of the *Universidad Politécnica* of Madrid:

Message of the Holy Father

*To the participants in the Day
Water, agriculture and food: let us build tomorrow*

I am grateful that you have invited me to address you at the beginning of the Conference “Water, agriculture and food: let us build tomorrow”, organized by various academic, social and ecclesial institutions, with the participation of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organizations based in Rome.

The theme that has brought them together reminds me of the psalmist, who gratefully acknowledges that “The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest” (*Ps* 85: 12). In another moment, the prophet Isaiah compares the word of God with the rainwater that soaks the earth, making it germinate “so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater” (55: 10). The rain, the harvest, the food. Biblical wisdom saw a close link between these elements and interpreted them from the perspective of gratitude, never from voracity or exploitation. The faith and experience of believers leads to this recognition, which transforms for us into a pressing call to responsibility, not to be caught in petty calculations that prevent us from helping the less favoured, who are deprived of their most basic needs. In this regard, the subtitle that they wanted to give their thoughts is inspiring, because the word “build” implies a sense of positivity, the contribution of a benefit, openness to the other, reciprocity and collaboration. These key words must not be forgotten, because the tomorrow we all want can only be the result of loyal, supportive and generous cooperation.

Indeed, the challenges to humanity at the present time are so complex that they require a sum of ideas, a unity of efforts, a complementarity of perspectives, while renouncing exclusionary selfishness and pernicious protagonism. In this way, sound decisions will be taken and solid foundations can be laid to build a fair and inclusive society in which no-one is left behind. A society that puts the human being and his fundamental rights at the centre, without being led astray by questionable interests that only enrich a few, unfortunately always the same. This will also be the way to ensure that future generations find a harmonious world without quarrels, with the necessary resources to enjoy a dignified and full life.

Although the land has resources for everyone, in terms of both quantity and quality, a large number of people suffer from hunger and are cruelly afflicted by poverty. To eradicate these scourges, it would be enough to eliminate injustices and inequities and put in place far-sighted and far-reaching policies, effective and coordinated measures, so that no one may lack daily bread or the means necessary to exist. Among them, water is essential and yet, unfortunately, not everyone has access to it, so it is essential that it be better distributed and managed in a sustainable and rational manner. Likewise it is also unavoidable to ensure the care and protection of the environment, safeguarding its beauty, preserving the copious variety of ecosystems, cultivating the fields with care, without greed and without causing irreversible damage.

The earth must be treated with tenderness, so as not to cause it damage, so as not to ruin the work of the hands of the Creator. When this is not done, the earth ceases to be a source of life for the human family. And this is what happens in many regions of our planet, where water is contaminated, garbage accumulates, deforestation advances, air is stale and soil acidified. All this generates a harmful accumulation of ills and miseries, which we also find when food is wasted and not shared; that is why it is essential to educate children and young people to nourish themselves healthily, not simply to eat. Correct nourishment involves knowing the value of food, disengagement from frenzied and compulsive consumerism, and making the table a place for encounter and fraternity, not just the space for ostentation, waste or whims.

I ask God the Father that all those who participate in this important Day leave it with a renewed desire to make the earth the common home that welcomes us all, a home of open doors, a place of communion and beneficial coexistence. In this way, the future will be full of light and can be faced by all with confidence and hope, as the fruit of a serene present rich in seeds of virtue and hope.

I wish you all the best for your work. I am pleased to impart to you the Apostolic Blessing and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Vatican City, 13 December 2018

FRANCIS
