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Address of the Cardinal Secretary of State at the presentation of the book “Riflessioni d’alta quota”, edited by Msgr. Leonardo Sapienza

The following is the address given by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin yesterday at the Pontifical Lateran University at the presentation of the book “*Riflessioni d’alta quota*”, edited by Msgr. Leonardo Sapienza:

Address of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Excellencies,

Magnificent Rector,

Reverend Fr. Sapienza,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I extend a cordial greeting to you all, while thanking you for your kind invitation.

I do not know if the brief reflections that I am about to share with you will be “*at high altitude*”, as the title of the volume would require.

I can tell you, however, that it was good to let myself be led to high altitude by the photographs and the words of the book, which are intended to guide us upwards. “Upwards” was the favourite motto of Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati, who loved to walk in groups in the mountains to find both the beauty of sharing with others the joys and harshness of the path, and the sense of living, which consists, in fact, in ascending on High, with a capital H.

Upwards is also an expression used by Saint John Paul II, whose affection for the mountains we recall when, faced with a spectacular alpine view, he said: “*Looking at the mountaintops, one has the impression that the earth is projected upwards, almost as if to touch the sky; in this momentum man feels that in some way his yearning for transcendence and for the infinite is interpreted*” (Angelus, 7 September 1986).

Pope Benedict added, in this regard, that “*In contact with nature, individuals rediscover their proper dimension, they recognize that they are creatures but at the same time unique, ‘capable of God’, since they are inwardly open to the Infinite*” (Angelus, 17 July 2005, *cit.* p.90).

The mountain, therefore, can represent the parable of life, outstretched towards the infinite.

On how to get there, the quotation of John Paul II is valid for the mountain as for life, again, as stated on page 12 of the volume: “*The highest peaks can only be reached with sacrifice*”. I don't want to say it by “professional deformation”, as if to suggest that good objectives, as in diplomacy, are almost always achieved through a path composed of renunciation and great patience. In reality, everyone has the concrete experience that the peaks of existence are reached through sacrifice.

And it is an awareness that is well trained in contact with the mountain: who among us, climbing it, has not wondered why we have made so much effort, especially when the summit never seems to arrive and along the way the initial enthusiasm quickly vanishes? Then, however, when you get to the summit and look down, you are taken by the surprise of seeing the same landscapes in a new way; only from above, together, do they reveal their harmonious beauty.

And another valuable lesson stands out before your eyes: from above you can see the path taken from another perspective. It is clear that none else could have been taken, that the path could not have been shortened in order to reach the goal. This is how it is in life: only by keeping a high perspective can we give a unified sense to the labours that are required in the journey of every day; only through the hairpin bends of sacrifices, the strength of will in continuing together, mutual encouragement and daily patience in approaching Heaven, do we arrive, step by step, touching with our own hands the infinity for which we were created.

It is therefore no coincidence that God set the “salient” moments of salvation history on the mountains: from Sinai, where He gave Moses the words of the Law, to Carmel, where He revealed His uniqueness and holiness through Elijah, there were many examples even before Jesus. He gave His first and most famous sermon on the hill, described indeed as being “On the Mount”, and then showed His glory by transfiguring Himself on Mount Tabor and fulfilling every Scripture on Calvary; He finally ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives.

In short, it seems that God, in order to reveal Himself, gave an appointment to humanity at a high level. Because only by detaching oneself from the living, the “earthly”, the horizontal, does man find truly stable bases of life, founded in heaven more than on earth, rooted in the things up there rather than in those that are down here (cf. *Col* 3:1), more in the thirst for the infinite to which we aspire than in the finite things we concern ourselves with. The essential can then be condensed in the words of John Paul I: “We must be hungry for holiness, nostalgic for the peaks” (*cit.*, p. 52).

Giving voice to some of the Popes mentioned in the text, I did not mention *Laudato si'*, which constitutes the fundamental thread running through the volume, to the point that it almost seems to be the transposition of the Encyclical into images. I will not dwell on it because the Rector will offer appropriate ideas on this very topical document, which calls us to care for creation. I would just like to evoke an image that I believe we still have in our eyes, even though it can no longer be represented in any volume. In fact, if the good photographers who immortalized some of the most characteristic forests of Trentino and Veneto were to return today, they could not take the same snapshots. They would find the remains of what happened a year ago: devastated and desolate lands, where before there were millions of trees from the precious and in some cases unique wood. It was a natural event, which however cannot but make us reflect on the deep causes of the climatic imbalances that we are increasingly witnessing. Pope Francis repeats that while God always forgives, and man sometimes, nature never forgives. And the sins that she does not forgive are exclusively our own. Very often it is blind greed for

money that prevents us from seeing beyond the immediate gains, casting into oblivion the future of generations to come and, thinking of the mountains, the harmful consequences linked to the melting of the glaciers and the unabated felling of trees. Just think of the drama of Amazonian deforestation.

Our volume opens with an aphorism from the ancient Chinese culture: "*How can the mountain remain beautiful, when something is taken away from it every day? How can a forest remain beautiful if every day the woodcutter cuts down a tree?*"

"*Riflessioni d'alta quota*" can help the reader to rise up, even causing him to understand how it is his task to safeguard creation, which is not simply something external to life, but is in a certain sense, the re-presentation of our inner world, with its beauty to cultivate and preserve and its more obscure aspects to prevent and counteract.

Pope Francis, in his recent *Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* of 1 September, also speaks of a book. Drawing on Franciscan wisdom, he describes the environment around us as "*the first 'book' that God opens before our eyes, so that, marvelling at its order, its variety and its beauty, we can come to love and praise its Creator*". He continues, "*In this book, every creature becomes for us 'a word of God'*", which can be heard in silence and prayer. I would add that in the book of creation, the mountains are the highest words. I therefore believe that the almost two hundred pages of the volume we are presenting today are the same number of cues to help us rediscover in creation, as Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, "*God's poem that preaches tenderness*" (*cit.* p. 126).

Last but not least, a word of gratitude, a feeling that arises spontaneously even just by flipping through the volume quickly. Thanks, before the authors, go to the remote Author, to the Creator "for the beauty of the mountains and woods, which bear within themselves", as John Paul II said (*cit.*, pg. 16) – *the visibility of the invisible*".

But praise must certainly go to those who have conceived, edited and published a book that allows us to hold in our hands images and words that help us to contemplate the wonders of creation.
