

## WELCOME ADDRESS

■ CARDINAL PETER K.A. TURKSON

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Speakers and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A warm welcome to today's timely Workshop here at the historic Casina Pio IV. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is honoured to join the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Università Lumsa and co-sponsor today's intensive reflection entitled "Emergenza Esclusi – the Emergency of the Socially Excluded".

Everyone knows how often Pope Francis speaks of the excluded, the marginalized, those on the periphery, those who are rejected and those who are in danger of being discarded. It is the Holy Father himself who urged Bishop Sánchez Sorondo to have this theme studied. From the very start, we recognize that the persons and populations, about whom we shall be speaking today, exist precariously – often with enormous sufferings – on the margins of *all* societies, not just the so-called "poor" or "developing" or "Southern" ones – the ones that used to be called "colonies" and then "III World" or even "IV World". No, unfortunately, practically all societies seem to have their growing populations of marginalized and rejected especially among the young and the old. Just yesterday, President Obama issued an overarching appeal, according to the *Associated Press*, to the Congress to correct **inequalities** (growing income gap) that make it harder for a child in the U.S.A. to escape poverty.<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospel of Mark, we have a glimpse, among many others in the Gospels, of Jesus' encounter with the socially excluded. Mark (1:40-45) narrates a curious story of Jesus' healing of a leper. In Jesus' day, lepers represented the worst of social exclusion. They lived on the periphery of human existence in all senses: they were complete outcasts.

But when one of them came to Jesus and asked for healing and was healed, the Evangelist narrates the episode to show how Jesus ended up trading positions with the leper. For, while the leper, now healed, regained

<sup>1</sup> <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/obama-speech-focus-income-disparities> "The Pope himself spoke about this at eloquent length. "How can it be", he wrote, "that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?"

inclusion and access into society, Jesus “*could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country*” (out in deserted places); although he would transform the state of exclusion he had assumed unto himself, as “*people came to him from every quarter*”. Jesus does not only transform the state of the excluded; he also transforms the *deserted places*, symbol of exclusion, into places of encounter and experience of God’s healing presence (locus of healing and salvation!).

If we had time, we could look at other unexpected reversals which took place when Jesus encountered, showed compassion, touched and transformed those who were by definition excluded: the victim in the story of the Good Samaritan; the Thief who is also now “Good” and has the name “Dismas”; the tax-collector Levi who became the apostle and evangelist Matthew; and the loveable Zaccheus; not to mention the prostitute on the verge of being stoned.

In the presence of these witnesses and with the testimony of the Gospels, then, let us ask our contemporary question: How, 2000 years later, may the Vicar of Christ, Pope Francis, and the Church of Christ he shepherds encounter the excluded, and lead and encourage those of other faiths, and many others of good will, to do likewise?

My Lord Bishop, Reverend Fathers, Distinguished Speakers, dear Ladies and Gentlemen, about two weeks ago, the Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz presented the Holy Father with the work which you see on the screen. Silently it proclaims: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20), and “Amen, I say to you: if you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me” (cf. Mt. 25:40).

The Holy Father called the sculpture “beautiful” and “excellent” but, more importantly, for a good while he contemplated it silently, and then he touched it, and blessed it. The sculpture is entitled “Jesus the Homeless” and, hopefully, a life-size bronze will find its place somewhere in a street of Rome near here. The Gospel account of Jesus healing a leper and the visual art of the sculpture help me to open this intensive workshop on ***the Emergency of the Socially Excluded*** by providing visible and tangible images of exclusion, which are also evangelical, of the millions of men, women and children to whom the workshop theme refer and addresses.

But, the presentation of this sculpture of the *homeless Jesus* was not the only occasion that the Holy Father has seized to demonstrate his great pastoral solicitude for the homeless poor, and the socially excluded. Long before coming to the Vatican, in his homeland, Argentina, the then Cardinal Bergoglio used to carry out a special ministry towards the *cartoneros*.

Lately and as Pope Francis, the world was stunned with disbelief, when, at the news of the ill-fated attempt of some North Africans to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, the Pope travelled to the Island of Lampedusa to honour the dead North Africans, to bless their watery grave, to console the survivors, and to awaken everyone. The Pope commended the Italian Coast Guard, but also cautioned the world about growing indifferent and insensitive to the phenomenon and plight of populations fleeing from adverse conditions of life. He spoke of the *globalization of indifference!*

Similarly, the whole world followed Pope Francis as he walked into the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro last July to communicate the very simple message of God's love for a part of the human family for whom exclusion by society seemed to also suggest an exclusion from God's love and care. For Pope Francis, it is important that the Christian proclamation of the mercy and tenderness of Christ reaches every person, regardless of their situation in life.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, not only has Pope Francis, even before he was elected a Pope, urged the Church to go the *periphery of human existence*; he has in recent times called on the Church to be poor in order to credibly address a message to the poor.

Now, Pope Francis who, at Lampedusa, warned the world about indifference and insensitivity to the condition of the poor and marginalized has also lately, in his Exhortation: *Evangelii Gaudium*, warned about an *economy of exclusion and inequality* which kills. Pope Francis cannot just yield to the same *globalized indifference* and insensitivity to the situation of the very many excluded people and their conditions of life. This underlies and accounts for the Holy Father's asking that the phenomenon of social exclusion be carefully studied, so that as both Church and as societies, we may learn to include the excluded, to reach out to those on the periphery and bring the marginalized into the embrace of community and fraternity.

So as I welcome all of you to this workshop and express great appreciation for the collaboration of the Università Lumsa in the planning of this workshop, I underline how deep must be the commitment which brings us here today: distinguished speakers and highly qualified participants. Clearly, for the Holy Father, and hopefully all of us too, this workshop is a response to and an expression both of *coherence between words and gestures*, which characterizes his ministry, and it is an expression of and a response to *the promptings of the love of Christ: "Caritas Christi urget nos"*.

<sup>2</sup> Private Audience with Don Julian Carron (*Communion and Liberation*), 11 October 2013.

With this biblical, artistic and spiritual introduction, and with gratitude to those who have come and those who have worked hard to prepare the day, may I invite us all to the coming hours of presentations, reflection and discussion. May the many excluded, who have been touched and healed by Christ and so become Saints, accompany us throughout the day and make it fruitful for the ministry of the Church and for repairing our broken societies.