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Message of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the occasion of World Fisheries Day (21 November 2024)

The following is the Message from the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., on the occasion of World Fisheries Day, to be held on 21 November 2024:

Message

“LET THE WATERS BRING FORTH SWARMS OF LIVING CREATURES” (*Gen 1:20*)

Dear brothers and sisters,

the waters of the deep often appear in Sacred Scripture as a symbol of the instability and restlessness that are part of our human experience. God’s people, however, remain firm in hope, for the covenant between heaven and earth is solid and renders even the sea traversable. This imagery speaks to our minds and hearts, and alters our perception of our daily work and its accompanying challenges. The annual celebration of World Fisheries Day offers us a particular opportunity to deepen our relationship with “Sister Water” and with the integral human development of all.

Fishing, which is one of the most ancient forms of human work, has greatly changed in many parts of our planet. The harm done to our common home by an aggressive and divisive economic model can be said to have directly affected the life and future of millions of human beings who make their living from fishing. Age-old equilibria between human labour and the natural environment have been disrupted by predatory practices and the use of technology for the benefit of an increasingly influential and powerful minority, unconcerned for the medium and long-term effects of this lethal economy. Thus the creative command – “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures” (*Gen 1:20*) – has been violated by intensive fishing, which is excluding those who for centuries have cared for the riches of seas, rivers and great lakes.

The Church shares in the joys and hopes but also the sorrows and grief of a humanity called at this moment in history to rediscover fraternity as a social and political reality and the culture of encounter as an alternative to the globalization of indifference. Christians cannot look the other way when entire ecosystems are menaced by practices that prove devastating and impoverish even to the point of starvation peoples who already suffer from discrimination and conflict. The recently concluded synodal assembly was an extraordinary occasion for reciprocal listening and a growing realization that in meeting these challenges the mission of the Church is clear.

To all those who acknowledge the effects of a negative paradigm of development, I would like to recall the Holy Father's recent message to Popular Movements: "You have moved beyond passivity and pessimism. Do not give in now to pain or resignation. You were unwilling to be docile victims, but saw yourself as a group, active participants in history. This is perhaps your most important contribution: you did not step back, but took the lead. Do not let yourselves be intimidated, move forward".[1] In this way, the Church would like fishers throughout the world to sense her accompaniment and support.

A technological development can exist and be pursued that is capable of upholding the dignity and security of labour, and restoring a balance between individuals, work and the environment. Lawmakers, too, can stand back from the great interests of a few and intervene on behalf of small communities, family businesses and organizations of fishers who, given suitable assurances, are in a position to contribute more directly and effectively to the common good. For theirs is a vocation to care for the sea, which must be protected within the purview of an integral, widespread and people-oriented ecology. This sensitivity fully makes fishers part of the members of the Body of Christ who cooperate in the building of a world more faithful to God's dreams.

As men and women of hope, let us remember the potent silence of prayer, which must always accompany our efforts on behalf of justice. Again, Pope Francis has said: "I pray that the economically powerful will come out of their isolation, reject the false security of money and be open to sharing the goods that are destined for all because they come from creation. All goods come from there and the goods of creation are destined for all. It is difficult for this to happen. It is difficult, but for God nothing is impossible".[2] This is also our prayer, as we entrust to the intercession of Mary, Star of the Sea, the concerns and aspirations of fishers and all those who benefit from their work.

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.
Prefect

[1] *Encounter with Popular Movements sponsored by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human development*, 20 September 2024.

[2] *Ibid.*
