



DICASTERO PER IL SERVIZIO
DELLO SVILUPPO UMANO INTEGRALE

Opening Eucharist of the World Congress of UNIAPAC

St Peter's Basilica, 21 October 2022

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

Isaiah 43, 19-21; Luke 19, 1-10

God is Doing Something New

1. Isaiah tells us that God will make a pathway through the wilderness. And in a dry wasteland and desert, God will let a river gush out fresh water for all His creatures to drink and be refreshed.

God ardently desires to do new things in history in order to assure the proper conditions for human and cosmic flourishing. But the dry land, the hard soil and inhospitable desert that God will change: they didn't just happen. They are the destructive results of the abuse of human freedom as symbolized by Babylon, who will "now be forced to flee in those ships they are so proud of" (Is 43:14).

Today violence, wars, grinding poverty and human suffering – all of it is brought very near – assault and sadden us. The tensions within countries, the violence spawning rivers of blood and rivers of tears for so many people in our world today, the environmental and climate deterioration: these result from so many abuses of our human freedom, from so many selfish and short-sighted choices.

2. When humans choose against the common good and against the care of creation, parched lands and sterile deserts result. But God is inviting us back to our proper nature as his creatures. God calls humans to embrace what is beautiful, true, life-giving, and worthy of praise. We capture this original intention of God when we consider the beautiful, lush and fruitful garden at the beginning of Genesis or the verdant lands refreshed by the healing waters flowing from the temple as described by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez 47: 6-12).

But what is it like, to hear this call from God?

3. Let's turn our attention to Zacchaeus, the tax-collector desperate to glimpse Jesus. In biblical times, tax-collectors weren't civil servants or public functionaries. Think of them as members of a guild of independent contractors whom the Romans engaged to collect taxes from subdued people. Each tax collector owed a certain sum to the Empire, and his earnings were whatever extra he could collect. Obviously, this could and did lead to terrible abuses and much suffering. It was brutal, vindictive, unjust.

Yet Zacchaeus was probably like many of us: not particularly bad and yet, unwittingly, propping up an abusive system and benefitting from it, enmeshed in what Pope John Paul II called "structures of sin." And these structures of sin impede and undermine the common good.

What happened to Zacchaeus when he met the Lord Jesus? Being recognized and affirmed by Jesus liberated Zacchaeus from the typical tax-collector's logic which, until then, had dominated his life. Thenceforth, though still a tax collector, he was resolved to renounce extortion. He was liberated from the structures of sin. Jesus freed him to be decent, to be generous, to be free, and indeed to be human and happy. In fact, the name "Zacchaeus" means "clean" and now it seems appropriate.

4. Now to become aware, and to do something about it: is this not the mission of UNIAPAC and the purpose of a World Congress? Let us think of a liberating conversion like that of Zacchaeus as a dynamic movement away from the idolization of any temporal reality. The idol can be the self; the idols can be of the market, of finance, of cultures, of nations, of races, and especially of wealth and of economic orthodoxies. Think here of the rigid attachment to business practices that are driven only by profit without consideration for the common good of this earth, our common home. Here is a description of the problematic status quo:

"Extravagance and wretchedness exist side by side ... While a few enjoy very great power of choice, the majority are deprived of almost all possibility of acting on their own initiative and responsibility, and often subsist in living and working conditions unworthy of the human person" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 63). The year was 1965, the author is Vatican II, the text comes from *Gaudium et Spes*. About a month ago, Pope Francis quoted it in an audience with Spanish entrepreneurs.

We are invited then, like Zacchaeus was, to turn towards God as our Creator and Saviour and Lord, and to one another as siblings, in a spirit of reverence, care,

recognition, and solidarity ... a movement from the abuse of human freedom and exploitation of others, to the transformation of human freedom in serving God and our neighbour and caring for our common home.

Through the encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus begins a new relationship with wealth through a radical and structural change that orients his life and activities towards God and others. He joins the ranks of those who, having turned towards God and their neighbours through good stewardship of their wealth, are helping God to “do something new” today.

An important point: a conversion like that of Zacchaeus is only the first if necessary step. It must be followed by “converting” the economy itself, so that money serves rather than rules. Such an economy would deliberately strive to serve the common good, not remain at the mercy of individual greed and self-interest.

5. I encourage you then, dear Christian entrepreneurs, to become architects of a new way of doing business that rejects the “recklessness” of Babylon and the avarice of the old Zacchaeus.

Two groups are really interested in such change: the poor, and the young.

To the poor, Pope Francis says, “We want your voices to be heard – voices that are rarely heard. No doubt this is because your voices cause embarrassment, no doubt it is because your cries are bothersome, no doubt because people are afraid of the change that you seek. However, without your presence, without truly going to the fringes, the good proposals and projects we often hear about at international conferences remain stuck in the realm of ideas and wishful thinking.”¹

To the young, Francis says, “Indeed, when civil society and businesses lack the skills of the young, the whole of society withers and the life of everyone is extinguished. There is a lack of creativity, optimism, enthusiasm, and courage to take risks. A society and an economy without young people are sad, pessimistic and cynical.”²

¹ Pope Francis, *Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014

² Pope Francis, “Economy of Francis”, *PalaEventi Santa Maria degli Angeli (Assisi)*, 24 September 2022

Have the poor and the young been invited to this Congress? If not, what have you put in place to ensure that they are not forgotten?

The Lord invites us to embrace a new way of seeing and acting like Zacchaeus, and Pope Francis expresses the invitation like this: “I encourage you to continue to creatively transform the face of the economy, so that it becomes more attentive to ethical principles (cf. *Laudato si'*, 189) and does not forget that its activity is at the service of human beings, not only of the few but of all, especially the poor. Moreover, it is important to realise that you are not above nature, but that you have to take care of it, because future generations depend on it.”³

Listen again to Isaiah: “Now, thus says the LORD, who created you ... and formed you ... See, I am doing something new!” (Is 43:19).

³ Pope Francis, Audience with Entrepreneurs from Spain, 17.10.2022