**THE FUTURE IS YOU**

Pope Francis

 The future is made of us and others like us, it is made of encounters, because life flows through our relations with others. Everyone’s existence is deeply tied to that of others: life is not merely time passing by; life is about interactions.

 We all need one another, none of us is an island or an autonomous and independent "I," separated from the other. We can build the future only by standing together, including everyone. We don’t think about it often, but everything is connected, and we need to restore our connections to a healthy condition. Even the harsh judgment I hold in my heart against my brother or my sister, the open wound that was never cured, the offense that was never forgiven, the rancour that is only going to hurt me, are all instances of a fight that I carry within me, a flare deep in my heart that needs to be extinguished before it goes up in flames, leaving behind only ashes.

 Many of us, nowadays, seem to believe that a happy future is something impossible to achieve. While such concerns must be taken very seriously, they are not invincible. They can be overcome when we don't lock our door to the outside world. Happiness can only be discovered as a gift of harmony between the whole and each single component. Even science points to an understanding of reality where every element connects and interacts with everything else.

 How wonderful would it be if the growth of scientific and technological innovation would be accompanied with more equality and social inclusion. How wonderful would it be, while we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters orbiting around us. How wonderful would it be if solidarity were not simply reduced to social work, and became, instead, the basic attitude in political, economic, and scientific choices, as well as in the relationships among individuals, peoples, and countries. Only by educating people to a true solidarity will we be able to overcome the "culture of waste," which doesn't concern only food and goods. Waste concerns, first and foremost, the people who are cast aside by our technological and economic systems which, without even realizing it, are now putting products at their core, instead of people.

 Solidarity is not an automatic mechanism. It cannot be programmed or controlled. It is a free response born from the heart of each and everyone. Yes, a free response! When we realize that life, even in the middle of so many contradictions, is a gift, and that love is the source and the meaning of life, how can we withhold our urge to do good to another fellow being?

 In order to do good, we need memory, we need courage, and we need creativity. Yes, love does require a creative, concrete, and ingenious attitude. Good intentions and conventional formulas, so often used to appease our conscience, are not enough. Let us help one another, all together, to remember that the other is not a statistic or a number. The other has a face. The "you" is always a real presence, a person to take care of.

 We have so much to do, and we must do it together. But how can we do it amid all the evil that we breathe in every day? Thank God, no system can nullify our desire to open up to the good, to compassion, and to our capacity to react against evil, all of which stem from deep within our hearts. Now you might tell me, "Sure, these are beautiful words, but I am not Mother Teresa of Calcutta." On the contrary: we are precious, each and every one of us. Each one of us is irreplaceable in the eyes of God. Through the darkness of today's conflicts, each of us can become a bright candle, a reminder that light will overcome darkness, and never the other way round.

 To Christians, the future does have a name. Its name is Hope. Feeling hopeful does not mean to be optimistically naïve and to ignore the tragedy that humanity is facing. Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see a tomorrow. Hope is the door that opens onto the future. Hope is a humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree. It is like some invisible yeast that allows the whole dough to grow, that brings flavour to all aspects of life. And it can do so much, because a tiny flicker of light that feeds on hope is enough to shatter the shield of darkness. A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. And then there will be another "you," and another "you," and it turns into an "us." And so, hope begins when we have an "us?" No. Hope began with one "you." But a revolution begins when there is an "us.”

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