

Conference on
Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking
New Synod Hall
11 April 2019

My dear brothers and sisters, good morning to you all!

I am very pleased to meet with you at the end of your conference dedicated to the implementation of the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, prepared by the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and approved by me. I thank Fr. Michael Czerny for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all the participants.

"I came that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). This sentence of the Gospel of John summarizes the mission of Jesus Christ: to offer the fullness of life to all men and women of every age, according to the plan of the Father. The Son of God became man to show all human beings the path to realizing their humanity, in conformity with each person's uniqueness and unrepeatability.

Unfortunately, the present world is sadly characterized by situations that hinder the fulfilment of this mission. As demonstrated by the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, "our times have witnessed a growth of individualism and egocentricity, attitudes that tend to regard others through a lens of cool utility, valuing them according to criteria of convenience and personal benefit" (§17).

It is essentially this tendency to commodify the other, which I have repeatedly denounced.¹ Trafficking in persons is one of the most dramatic manifestations of this commodification. In its many forms, it constitutes "an open wound on the body of contemporary society",² a

¹ Cfr *Discorso ai partecipanti alla Plenaria del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura*, 7 febbraio 2015; *Udienza Generale*, 22 aprile 2015; *Esort. ap. postsin. Amoris laetitia*, 54; *Discorso ai membri della Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia*, 21 settembre 2017.

² *Discorso ai partecipanti alla Conferenza Internazionale sulla Tratta delle Persone Umane*, 10 aprile 2014.

profound scourge in the humanity of those who suffer it and of its perpetrators. Trafficking profoundly disfigures the humanity of the victim, offending his or her freedom and dignity. But, at the same time, it dehumanizes those who carry it out, denying them access to "life to the full". Finally, trafficking seriously damages humanity as a whole, tearing apart the human family and the Body of Christ.

Trafficking, as I have already said, constitutes an unjustifiable violation of the freedom and dignity of its victims, of these constitutive dimensions of the human being that are willed and created by God. For this reason it is to be considered a crime against humanity.³ The same gravity, by analogy, must be attributed to all forms of contempt for the freedom and dignity of every human being, be they a compatriot or a foreigner.

Those who are guilty of this crime cause damage not only to others but also to themselves. In fact, each of us is created to love and care for others, and this reaches its climax in the gift of self: "No one has greater love than this: to give his life for his friends" (Jn 15, 13). In the relationship that we establish with others we play out our humanity, approaching or moving away from the model of human being wanted by God the Father and revealed in the incarnate Son. Therefore, every choice contrary to the realization of God's project for us is a betrayal of our humanity and renounces that "life to the full" offered by Jesus Christ.

³ Cfr *Discorso ad un gruppo di nuovi Ambasciatori in occasione della presentazione delle Lettere Credenziali*, 12 dicembre 2013; *Discorso alla Delegazione dell'Associazione Internazionale di Diritto Penale*, 23 ottobre 2014; *Messaggio ai partecipanti alla Conferenza sulla Tratta degli Esseri Umani organizzata dal "Gruppo Santa Marta"*, 30-31 ottobre 2015; *Discorso ai partecipanti all'incontro sulla Tratta degli Esseri Umani promosso da "RENATE"*, 7 novembre 2016; *Parole ai partecipanti alla IV Giornata Mondiale di Preghiera e Riflessione contro la Tratta di Persone*, 12 febbraio 2018; *Incontro pre-sinodale con i giovani*, 19 marzo 2018; *Videomessaggio ai partecipanti al II Forum Internazionale sulla Schiavitù Moderna*, 5-8 maggio 2018; *Discorso ai partecipanti all'Assemblea Plenaria della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze*, 12 novembre 2018; *Saluto ai membri della Fondazione Galileo*, 8 febbraio 2019.

All actions that aim to restore and promote our humanity and that of others fulfill the mission of the Church, as a continuation of the saving mission of Jesus Christ. And this missionary value is evident in the struggle against all forms of trafficking and in every commitment to the redemption of the survivors; a struggle and a commitment that also have beneficial effects on our own humanity, opening the way to the fullness of life, the ultimate end of our existence.

Your presence, dear brothers and sisters, is a tangible sign of the generous commitment of many local Churches in this pastoral field. The numerous initiatives that you see on the front lines to prevent trafficking, protect survivors and prosecute offenders are worthy of admiration. I feel I must express special thanks to the many religious congregations that have worked and continue to work in this field, even online, thus acting as the "avant-garde" of the Church's missionary action against all forms of trafficking.

Much has been done and is being done; but much remains to be done. Faced with human trafficking, a phenomenon as complex as it is dark, it is essential to ensure the coordination of various pastoral initiatives, both locally and internationally. The offices established by local Churches, religious congregations and Catholic organizations are called to share their experience and knowledge and to join forces in synergistic activity spanning the countries of origin, transit and destination of those who are trafficked.

To make its action more adequate and effective, the Church must learn how to welcome the help of other political and social actors. Engagement in structured collaborations with public institutions and civil society organizations will guarantee more effective and longer-lasting results.

I sincerely thank you for all that you are already doing on behalf of our many brothers and sisters who are the innocent victims of the commodification of the human person. I encourage you to persevere in this mission – often risky and anonymous, but precisely because of this, irrefutable proof of your selfless generosity.

Through the intercession of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who was reduced to slavery as a child, sold and bought, but eventually liberated and who then “flourished” in fullness as God's daughter, I invoke abundant blessings on all of you and on those who are committed to the struggle against human trafficking.

I assure you that I remember you in prayer. Please do not forget to pray for me!

Unofficial translation