



The Holy See

MESSAGGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRD LATIN AMERICAN CONFERENCE

"VULNERABILITY AND ABUSE"

[Panama, 12-14 March 2024]

Dear congress participants,

I would like to send my greetings to the organizers and participants in this Third Latin American Congress promoted by CEPROME, entitled *Vulnerability and abuse: Towards a broader view of prevention*, and commend to the Lord their work, so that they may continue to advance in the eradication of the scourge of abuse in all spheres of society.

During my meeting last 25 September with a delegation from this Council, I highlighted the Church's commitment to see the face of the suffering Jesus in each of the victims. However, at the same time, the need to place at His feet "the suffering we have received and caused", praying to Him "for the unhappiest and most desperate sinners, for their conversion, so that they may see in others the eyes of Jesus who calls out to them".

On that occasion I invited you, and I invite you today too, to see this problem through the eyes of God, to enter into dialogue with Him. This divinely-aided gaze can help our understanding of vulnerability, for the Lord "in our weakness perfects His power, and on the feeble bestows strength to bear Him witness" (cf. *Preface of the Holy Martyrs*, 1). God calls us to a complete change of mindset with regard to our concept of relationships, privileging the least, the poor, the servant, and the ignorant, over the rich, the rich, the master, and the learned, on the basis of the ability to accept the grace given to us by God and to make ourselves a gift to others.

Seeing one's own weakness as an excuse for failing to be full persons and full Christians, unable to take control of their destiny, will create childish, resentful people, and in no way represents the smallness to which Jesus invites us. On the contrary, the strength of the one who, like Saint Paul, glories in his weaknesses and trusts in the grace of the Lord (cf. *2 Cor 12:8-10*) is a gift that we

must ask for in prayer, for ourselves and for others. With it, we will be able to face the contradictions of life and make a contribution to the common good in the vocation to which we have been called.

In terms of prevention, our work must undoubtedly aim to eradicate situations that protect those who hide behind their position to impose themselves on others in a perverse way, but also to understand why they are incapable of relating to others in a healthy way. Likewise, it cannot be indifferent to the reason why some accept to go against their own conscience, out of fear, or allow themselves to be cajoled by false promises, knowing in their heart of hearts that they are on the wrong path. Humanizing relationships in any society, including the Church, means working hard to form mature, coherent people who, firm in their faith and ethical principles, are capable of confronting evil, bearing witness to the truth in capital letters.

A society that is not based on these assumptions of moral integrity will be an ailing society, with human and institutional relationships distorted by selfishness, mistrust, fear and deceit. But let us trust our weakness in the strength that the Lord gives us. And we recognize that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7).

Let us ask the King of martyrs for this grace in order to be His witnesses in the world. May He bless you and may the Holy Virgin keep you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 1 March 2024

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