**Pope urges choices that ensure food, healthcare, living conditions for the poor.**

Pope Francis on Monday addressed a group of participants in the general assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, which is discussing, “Public Health in Global Perspective“.

By Robin Gomes

Expressing pain at strong inequalities in healthcare and living conditions of people that prove that not all lives are equal and health is not protected for all in the same way, Pope Francis on Monday called for political, social and environmental choices that ensure access to food, healthcare and improved living conditions, especially for the poor. “Indeed, the pandemic crisis has made "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Laudato si', 49) resound even more strongly. We cannot be deaf to this twofold cry; we must listen to it well!”

**Listening to cries**

Tired of much discussions on the Covid-19 pandemic, we are tempted to move over to other issues, but the Pope said, “It is essential to reflect calmly in order to examine in depth what has happened and to glimpse the road to a better future for all.”

He urged the participants to listen carefully to the situation, in order to foster a true and proper conversion and to arrive at the specification of concrete decisions to come out of the crisis better.

**Interconnectedness demands working together**

The Pope encouraged the Academy’s efforts on global ethics in public health saying it allows us to focus on aspects that are important for the coexistence of the human family and for the strengthening of a fabric of social friendship, which are the central themes of his Encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*.

The pandemic crisis has highlighted how profound is the interdependence both among ourselves and between the human family and the common home. Underscoring the harmful tendency of disregarding our “interconnectedness”, the Pope called for a co-operation between different disciplines, such as biology and hygiene, medicine and epidemiology, economics and sociology, as well as anthropology and ecology.  This also calls for identifying technological, political and ethical criteria for action with regard to health systems, the family, work and the environment.

This co-operation, the Pope said, is particularly needed in the healthcare sector, because health and disease are determined not only by the processes of nature but also by social life.

He lamented that many very serious problems are ignored because of a lack of adequate commitment, such as with malaria and tuberculosis that underscore the precariousness of sanitary conditions that causes millions of avoidable deaths.  These issues have not drawn the mobilization of energy and resources as Covid-19 pandemic.

**Living conditions**

While commending the measures against Covid-19 on a global level, the Pope said it should also make us alert and be responsible for the serious conditions in which others live, such as the lack of vaccines, drinking water and food, regarding which we have so far taken little or no interest.

In this regard, the Holy Father said he does not know whether to laugh or cry when he hears authorities advising slum dwellers to sanitize themselves several times a day with soap and water when they have neither water nor soap.  They are asked not to come out of their homes when the whole neighborhood is their home. The application of the criterion of justice, the Pope said, should be applied in the broader field of health needs and the promotion of life.

**Inequalities**

Considering health in its multiple dimensions and interconnectedness, the Pope said, we can observe how even living conditions, which are the result of political, social and environmental choices, have an impact on the health of human beings.  He said there were strong inequalities in different countries and in different social groups regarding life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, which depends on variables such as salary level, educational qualification and the neighbourhood.  The inalienable dignity of the human person calls for appropriate commitment to overcome inequalities, or else we are in fact accepting the painful reality that not all lives are equal and health is not protected for all in the same way.

Pope Francis wished that a free healthcare system such as in Italy and elsewhere, continue, otherwise only those who can afford to pay will have the right to healthcare.  Free healthcare, he said, helps overcome inequality.

**Abortion and euthanasia – culture of waste**

Pope Francis urged support for international and common initiatives, such as that of the G20 that aims at creating global governance for the health of all the inhabitants of the planet.  In this regard, the Pontifical Academy for Life can also offer a valuable contribution, such as in public debates, without "watering down" the Christian anthropological proposal, inspired by Revelation, which can also help today's men and women to rediscover the primacy of the right to life from conception to its natural end.

He lamented today’s culture of waste which kills babies directly with abortion.  This has become a “normal” habit, which is very ugly and “really a murder”.  In this regard, the Pope asked a double question: “Is it right to eliminate, to take a human life to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hitman to solve a problem? That's what abortion is.”

The Holy Father also spoke about the elderly, who are regarded as “waste material” a bit because they are of no use... But they are roots of wisdom, which this civilization discards.

He denounced what he described as the law of "hidden" euthanasia, which shortens the life of the elderly who are provided only half the medicines, arguing they are expensive.   Catholic academics, universities and hospitals, the Pope said, cannot walk the road of “waste”.