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MESSAGE FOR WORLD TOURISM DAY 2013

'TOURISM AND WATER - PROTECTING OUR COMMON FUTURE'

"On September 27, we will celebrate World Tourism Day, following the theme suggested for this year by the World Tourism Organization: 'Tourism and water: protecting our common future'. This is in line with the 'International Year of Cooperation for Water', that was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, during the International Decade for Action 'Water, source of life' (2005-2015), in order to highlight 'that water is critical for sustainable development, especially for environmental integrity and eradication of poverty and hunger, it is essential for the health and well-being of human beings, and is fundamental to achieve the Millennium Development Goals'.

"The Holy See also wishes to join in this commemoration, bringing its contribution from its own perspective, aware of the importance of the phenomenon of tourism at the present time and the challenges and opportunities it provides to our mission of evangelization. This is one of the economic sectors with the largest and fastest growth in the world. We must not forget that last year it was exceeded the milestone of one billion international tourists, to which we must add the even higher figures of local tourism.

"In the tourism sector, water is of crucial importance, an asset and a resource. It is an asset because people feel naturally drawn to it, and there are millions of tourists seeking to enjoy this natural element during their days off, by choosing as their holiday destination some ecosystems where water is the most specific element (wetlands, beaches, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, islands, glaciers or snowfields, just to name a few), or trying to grasp its many benefits (especially in seaside resorts or spas). At the same time, water is also a resource for the tourism industry and it is essential, among other things, to hotels, restaurants and leisure activities.

"Looking at the future, tourism will be a real benefit if it will be able to manage these resources according to the criteria of the 'green economy', an economy whose environmental impact is kept within acceptable limits. We are invited, therefore, to promote ecotourism, environmentally friendly and sustainable, that can surely promote the creation of new jobs, support the local economy and reduce poverty.

"There is no doubt that tourism plays a fundamental role in preserving the environment, by being one of its great ally, but also a fierce enemy. If, for instance, in order to achieve

a quick and easy economic profit, the tourism industry is allowed to pollute a place, this location will cease to be a popular destination for tourists.

“We know that water, key to sustainable development, is an essential element for life. Without water there is no life. 'However, year after year the pressure on this resource increases. One out of three people live in a country with moderate to high-water shortages, and it is possible that by 2030 the shortage will affect almost half of the world's population, since its demand may exceed the supply by 40%'. According to UN data, about one billion people have no access to drinking water. And the challenges related to this issue will increase significantly in the coming years, mainly because it is poorly distributed, polluted and wasted, or priority is given to certain incorrect or unjust uses, in addition to the consequences of climate change. Tourism also is often in competition with other sectors for the usage of water, and not infrequently it is noted that water is abundant and is wasted in tourism structures, while for the surrounding populations it is scarce.

“The sustainable management of this natural resource is a challenge for the social, economic and environmental order, but especially because of the ethical nature, starting from the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth, which is a natural and original right, to which it must be submitted all the legislation relating to those goods. The Social Doctrine of the Church highlights the validity and application of this principle, with explicit references to water.

“Indeed, our commitment to preserving creation stems from recognizing it as God's gift to the whole human family, and from hearing the Creator's calling, who invites us to preserve it, aware of being the stewards, not owners, of the gift He gives us.

“Concern for the environment is an important topic for Pope Francis, who has already made many references to it. In the very mass of the inauguration of his Petrine ministry he invited us to be 'stewards of creation, of God's plan written in nature, the guardians of the other, of the environment; let us not allow' he said, 'that signs of destruction and death accompany our journey in this world', recalling that 'everything is entrusted to the custody of man, and it is everyone's responsibility'.

“Stressing even more this calling, the Holy Father stated during a General Audience: 'Cultivating and preserving creation is a directive of God given not only at the beginning of history, but to each one of us; it is part of his plan; it means allowing the world to grow responsibly, transforming it to be a garden, a living place for all Instead we are often driven by pride of domination, of possession, manipulation, exploitation; we do not 'preserve' it, do not respect it, do not consider it as a free gift to care for. We are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, listening to creation'.

“If we foster this attitude of listening, we can discover how water speaks to us also of his Creator and reminds us of his story of love for humanity. Regarding this, it is eloquent the prayer for the blessing of water, that the Roman liturgy uses both at the Easter Vigil

and in the Ritual of baptism, where it is recalled that the Lord used this gift as a sign and remembrance of his goodness: Creation, the flood that puts an end to sin, the crossing of the Red Sea that delivers from slavery, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the washing of the feet that turns into the precept of love, the water pouring out of the side of Christ Crucified, the command of the Risen Lord to make disciples and baptize them ... are milestones in the history of Salvation, in which water takes on a high symbolic value.

“Water speaks of life, purification, regeneration and transcendence. In the liturgy, water manifests the life of God shared with us in Christ. Jesus himself presents himself as the one who quenches our thirst, from whose breast rivers of living water shall flow, and in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman he says: 'whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never thirst'. Thirst evokes the deepest yearnings of the human heart, his failures and his quest for authentic happiness beyond himself. And Christ is the one who gives the water that quenches the thirst within, he is the source of rebirth, the bath that purifies. He is the source of living water.

“For this reason, it is necessary to reiterate that all those involved in the phenomenon of tourism have a big responsibility for water management, in order for this sector to be effectively a source of wealth at a social, ecological, cultural and economic level. While we must work to fix the damage already done, we should also encourage its rational use and minimize the impact by promoting appropriate policies and providing effective ways, aiming at protecting our common future. Our attitude towards nature and the mismanagement of its resources cannot burden others as well as future generations.

“Therefore more determination from politicians and entrepreneurs is necessary, because, although all are aware of the challenges made by the issue of water, we are conscious that this willingness should be put into practice with binding, specific and verifiable commitments.

“This situation requires above all a change of mentality leading to adopt a different lifestyle marked by sobriety and self-discipline. We must ensure that tourists are aware and reflect on their responsibilities and the impact of their trip. They must be convinced that not everything is allowed, although they personally carry the economic burden. We need to educate and encourage the small gestures allowing us not to waste or pollute the water and, at the same time, help us appreciate even more its importance.

“We share the Holy Father’s concern to take 'all the serious commitment to respect and preserve creation, to be responsible for every person, to oppose the culture of waste, to promote a culture of solidarity and encounter'.

“With St. Francis, the 'Little Poor' of Assisi, we raise our hymn to God, praising him for his creatures: 'Praised be to you, my Lord, for sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and pure’”.

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples