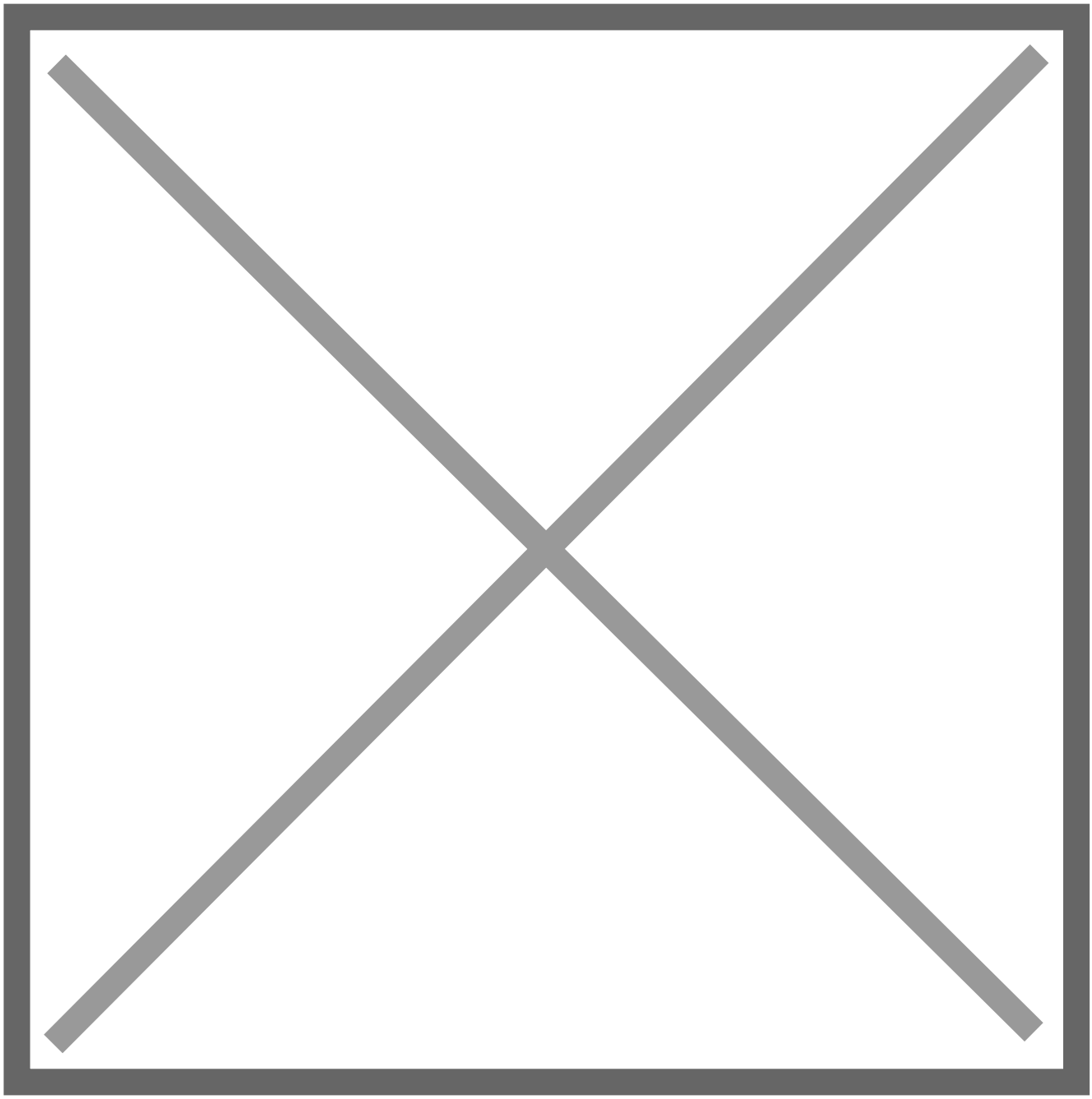
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EarthBeat



Pope Francis speaks during a Sept. 12, 2020, meeting with members of the Laudato Si' Communities in the Paul VI audience hall at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Contemplation and compassion are the necessary components of an integral ecology that ensures both the care of the environment and the common good, Pope Francis said.

"Compassion is the opposite of indifference," Francis said Sept. 12, during an audience with members of the *Laudato Si*' Communities. "Our compassion is the best vaccine against the epidemic of indifference."

The *Laudato Si*' Communities in Italy were founded by Bishop Domenico Pompili of Rieti, Italy, and Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food Movement, a grassroots organization that promotes the preservation of local food culture and traditional cooking to counteract the rise of fast food chains and food waste.

According to their website, the communities were inspired by Francis' encyclical on the environment and seek to spread its message "of integral ecology, social justice and solidarity through events, conferences, workshops, courses, publications, exchanges and initiatives."

In his address, the pope emphasized the need for an integral ecology because "we are all creatures, and everything in creation is related."

The current pandemic, the pope said, has shown that the health of men and women "cannot be separated from that of the environment in which they live."

"It is also clear that climate change not only upsets the balance of nature, but also causes poverty and hunger; it affects the most vulnerable and sometimes forces them to leave their land," he said.

The pope said that nature today is no longer admired or contemplated, but rather "devoured," and that humanity has become voracious in its consumption of natural resources.

Humankind is "sick from consumption. This is our disease. [We are] sick from consumption," he said. "We are scrambling for the latest 'app,' but we no longer know the names of our neighbors, much less know how to distinguish one tree from another."

"Contemplation is the antidote to hasty, superficial and inconclusive choices," he said. "Those who contemplate learn to feel the ground that sustains them, understand that they are not alone and without meaning."

This contemplation, he continued, leads to compassion, which does not mean "I pity you" but rather "to suffer with" others.

"Compassion is not a beautiful feeling, it is not pietism; it means creating a new bond with the other," Francis said. "The world needs this creative and active charity, people who do not stand in front of a screen to comment, but instead, people who get their hands dirty to remove degradation and restore dignity."

Explaining the nature of indifference in the world, the pope recalled a photo hanging in the papal almoner's office depicting a homeless woman with her hand outstretched begging for alms while an apparently wealthy woman passes her by.

"You can see a lady of a certain age coming out of a luxurious restaurant, wearing a fur coat, a hat, gloves, well covered from the cold after eating well," the pope said.

He quickly added that the wealthy woman's sin was looking the other way, not going to a nice restaurant. "It is no sin to eat well," he said.

The remark echoed a quote in a recent book by Petrini, *TerraFutura [Future Earth]: Conversations with Pope Francis on Integral Ecology.*

In the book, Petrini — who is agnostic — told the pope that when it comes to pleasure, the Catholic Church "always mortified" it as if it "were something to be

avoided."

The pope disagreed with Petrini's assertion, emphasizing that the church has condemned "inhuman, crude, vulgar pleasure" and has always accepted "human, sober and moral pleasure."

"Pleasure comes directly from God, it is not Catholic, neither Christian nor anything else, it is simply divine," the pope said in the book. "The pleasure of eating serves to keep one in good health through eating, just as sexual pleasure is done to make love more beautiful and ensure the continuation of the species."

"What you say refers to a sanctimonious morality, a moralism that makes no sense and that may have been, at some time, a bad interpretation of the Christian message," the pope told Petrini. "On the contrary, the pleasure of eating as well as sexual pleasure come from God."

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