LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 9 September 2026
[**Multimedia**]

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. IV. Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes (GS12-22). *2. Human dignity: gift and responsibility.*

Brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

The Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*), by dedicating the first chapter to the dignity of the human person, emphasizes that it is the foundation and condition for "those values which are most highly prized today", but these must not lose sight of their "divine source", in order to avoid possible distortions arising from the "taint in man's human hear t(GS, 11).

The journey that made it possible to highlight the fundamental characteristics and rights of human dignity certainly represents one of the most significant chapters in human history. However, the path ahead is not yet complete and must address the contradictions, both old and new, which prevent its full realization.

The Church clearly offers her contribution, reminding us that human dignity arises from the very being of the person. I had the opportunity to reiterate this also in my recent Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*: "Every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with Him, with others and with creation. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of His unfailing love" (no. 50). The infinite dignity of the human being, then, is rooted in his identity as a creature made "'to God's image' ... capable of knowing and loving his Creator", a plan and gift of love that transcends other created realities, which are entrusted to his care to "subdue them and use them to God's glory" (*GS*, 12).

In faith we can understand the ultimate foundation for the dignity of the person, inasmuch as the Son, "by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (no. 22).

The person always implies relationship, communion and participation in relation to God and to others; hence, a filial relationship with God the Father and a fraternal relationship with Christ and with all humankind. It excludes self-centred isolation. To be a person means to perceive oneself as a gift to be shared, growing and maturing through acceptance, reciprocity and service.

This dignity is entrusted to the responsibility of each person: at the same time, it also demands solidarity and mutual care, overcoming the many falsifications and manipulations that still disfigure our perception of it and hinder its realization. Indeed, as a result of the choices made throughout history that have run counter to this dignity, even today "man is split within himself", and "all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil between light and darkness". This fragile and limited condition, however, can be regarded with hope, because "the Lord Himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out that 'prince of this world' (*John* 12:31) who held him in the bondage of sin" (*GS*, 13).

Furthermore, the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that human dignity concerns the whole person and, therefore, dualistic views must be overcome: the human being "though made of body and soul, is one". Reducing the body to an "object" to be disposed of arbitrarily is always a denial of the dignity of the person: "man is not allowed to despise his bodily life" and "is obliged to regard his body as good and honourable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day", while ensuring that it does not become enslaved by "the evil inclinations of his heart" (*GS*, 14), since we are all wounded by sin.

Finally, there *Gaudium et Spes* recalls the three most significant expressions of the dignity of the person: intelligence, which makes the human being an insatiable seeker of the truth (no. 15); conscience, through which he gives unity and meaning to his life (no. 16), and freedom, which makes him the responsible agent of his own decisions (no. 17). These dimensions are closely connected to one another: it is in conscience that truth is recognized as such, and freedom can experience it as its foundation and possibility. The Holy Spirit, who gives life in Christ, makes us free and constantly assures us of our dignity as children of God, delivering us from fear and guiding us towards the ultimate goal, that life in its fullness beyond death which Christ has promised us. It is only in Him that the mystery of the human person finds true light; from Him we receive light on the enigma of suffering and death; and with Him we journey towards the Resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters, created in God's image, through Christ and for His sake, we have received a unique and indelible dignity. Let us commit ourselves to promoting and defending it always, with the light and strength of the Gospel.

Greeting:

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, South Africa, Australia, China, Japan, Lebanon, the Philippines, and the United States of America. In a particular way, I gladly renew my welcome to the members of the Steering Committee of the Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab World, who are present today. I thank you for your cooperation with the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, and pray that your efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in the Arab region will indeed bear much fruit. Upon each of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Summary of Catechesis:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council, we continue our reflection on *Gaudium et Spes*, focusing on the dignity of the human person. Human dignity flows from our identity as children made in the image and likeness of God. We are endowed with the gifts of intelligence, for seeking truth; conscience, for recognizing our ultimate calling; and freedom, for choosing the good. Only through Christ do we understand that our personhood implies relationship and the call to give ourselves as a gift to God and others. May we therefore help each other to guard and defend our God-given dignity and journey together toward our heavenly homeland.

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