

Francis dedicated this week's General Audience to the importance of countering our culture of waste. "Throwing food away is like stealing from the tables of the poor," the Pope said

ALESSANDRO SPECIALE
ROME



On World Environmental Day Pope Francis took the opportunity during the General Audience to send out "a strong reminder of the need to eliminate the waste and disposal of food," *Vatican Radio* reports. In today's catechesis, the Pope firmly rejected today's uncontrolled "culture of waste", disposability and quick consumption, which leads to the worship of money and stock markets.

"This "culture of waste" tends to become the common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person is no longer perceived as a primary value to be respected and protected, especially if poor or disabled, if not yet useful - such as the unborn child - or no longer needed - such as the elderly. This culture of waste has made us insensitive even to the waste and disposal of food, which is even more despicable when all over the world, unfortunately, many individuals and families are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Once our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any leftover food," the Vatican Radio reported the Pope saying.

Francis spoke out against the indifference in the world today. People die of cold in the streets because of this indifference: "If in so many parts of the world there are children who have nothing to eat, that's not news, it seems normal. It cannot be this way! Yet these things become the norm: that some homeless people die of cold on the streets is not news. In contrast, a ten point drop on the stock markets of some cities is a tragedy. A person dying is not news, but if the stock markets drop ten points it is a tragedy! Thus people are disposed of, as if they were trash. Consumerism has led us to become used to an excess and daily waste of food, to which, at times, we are no longer able to give a just value, which goes well beyond mere economic parameters," Francis said according to the *Vatican Radio* website's report.

"Man is not in charge today, money is in charge, money rules. God our Father did not give the task of caring for the earth to money, but to us, to men and women:

we have this task! Instead, men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the "culture of waste." If you break a computer it is a tragedy, but poverty, the needs, the dramas of so many people end up becoming the norm. If on a winter's night, here nearby in Via Ottaviano, for example, a person dies, that is not news. If in so many parts of the world there are children who have nothing to eat, that's not news, it seems normal," the Pope said.

"To "cultivate and care" encompasses not only the relationship between us and the environment," but human relations as well. "We are living in a time of crisis." "The human person is in danger," the Pope said.



Christians are the Arab Spring's biggest losers, says Melkite archbishop Chacour

The Archbishop of Israel's Greek Melkite Catholic Church, told Vatican Insider the situation in Syria is tragic and asked why the West is doing nothing to help

ANDREA TORNIELLI [HAIFA, ISRAEL]



"Arab Spring is not the right term. This was no spring. It was a monumental bloodbath. So many died, but the biggest losers are the Christians..." Elias Chacour, the Archbishop of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church is the elder of one of the largest communities of Arab Catholics in Israel. The Church has 80 thousand faithful, 32 parishes and 28 priests. The archbishop met *Vatican Insider* and other Italian media in his residence in the Israeli city of Haifa, a shining example of peaceful co-existence between religions. During his meeting with journalists, he expressed his concerns about the fate of Christians who have been forced to flee Syria, about the dialogue process with the Orthodox Church and about Pope Francis.

"I do not know why so many lost their lives in the Arab "Spring" – which was not a spring at all since it produced no fruits and new life was nowhere to be seen. The Chaldean bishop in the U.S., Ibrahim Ibrahim told me that Detroit's 4000 Chaldean Christians have now become 130 thousand because many fled the countries where

they had previously been living. I ask myself why the West is doing nothing to stop what is going on in Syria. **160 little Christian villages have been completely abandoned.** Many are fleeing to Lebanon but we do not know how many. I saw our bishop of Damascus cry like a baby: every single Christian in Syria needs our help; they need every bit of bread and every glass of water they can get...”

Archbishop Chacour said all that has happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria over the past few years has been “a turning point in Islamic history. Before, leaders would engage in power struggle without involving the public. We were not happy with the totalitarian regimes but we are not happy today either. This is partly because of the risk of Islamic Sharia law coming into force, which would be abominable. We don’t know what will happen further on down the line,” the archbishop said.

The head of the Greek Melkite Church then went on to talk about the domestic situation: “We are Israeli citizens; we have not yet resolved all our problems but we are soldiering on: we must resist any assimilation and work towards integration. Unlike other Christian communities we do not have any foreign protectors.” Chacour saw the agreement over the Easter Sunday date as a big step forward in achieving Christian unity in Israel. We have decided to go by the Julian calendar. This has reduced our differences. The Latin Patriarchate and the Anglicans switched to this calendar too... The streets of Haifa have been blocked off to traffic for three days now. It was such a joy to join our Orthodox brothers and sisters for the Palm Sunday procession. The mayor of Haifa saw this and said: “If you do this every week, I’m behind you.”

The archbishop also answered a question about Pope Francis’ decision to emphasise his Bishop of Rome role. The Orthodox looked very favourably upon this, as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, confirmed in an interview. “It was an act of humility; by focusing on his role as Bishop of Rome, Francis showed himself to be a hero of humility. Other Popes have often neglected to do this and have ended up seeing themselves as bishops of the world.”

But Elias Chacour was keen to stress that “Rome should not be forgotten. But more importantly, we must not forget that it was here that it all started, not in Rome. When my priests go on pilgrimages to Lourdes and Medjugorje, I always say to them: “Tell Mary it’s time she comes home.” People tend to forget Mary is from Nazareth and that Jesus was the man who lived in Nazareth; he’s my fellow countryman.”

The Melkite archbishop also talked about the Latin Rite Catholics. “There are fewer of them compared to us. The community of Arab Catholics under the Latin Rite is composed of 10 thousand people but they have a Patriarch, four bishops, hundreds of priests and numerous women religious: lucky them! We need to do more in terms of sharing not just communion. It is not just our problems we should share. You will know that every year we hold a Good Friday collection for the Holy Land’s Christians. I can assure you that although I am Catholic, I see nothing of these offerings.” The collection Chacour was referring to, is traditionally split between the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate.



**Palestinian funeral in a Nazareth Melkite Greek Catholic Church,
Galilee, Israel**