



The Holy See

HOLY MASS WITH SEMINARIANS, NOVICES AND THOSE DISCERNING THEIR VOCATION

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

*Vatican Basilica
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[Multimedia]

Photo Gallery

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting you, and today our joy is even greater, because we have gathered for the Eucharist on the Lord's Day. You are seminarians, novices, young people on a vocational journey, from every part of the world. You represent the Church's youth! If the Church is the Bride of Christ, you in a certain sense represent the moment of betrothal, the Spring of vocation, the season of discovery, assessment, formation. And it is a very beautiful season, in which foundations are laid for the future. Thank you for coming!

Today the word of God speaks to us of mission. Where does mission originate? The answer is simple: it originates from a call, the Lord's call, and when he calls people, he does so with a view to sending them out. How is the one sent out meant to live? What are the reference points of Christian mission? The readings we have heard suggest three: the joy of consolation, the Cross and prayer.

1. The first element: *the joy of consolation*. The prophet Isaiah is addressing a people that has been through a dark period of exile, a very difficult trial. But now the time of consolation has come for Jerusalem; sadness and fear must give way to joy: "Rejoice ... be glad ... rejoice with her in joy," says the prophet (66:10). It is a great invitation to joy. Why? What is the reason for this invitation to joy? Because the Lord is going to pour out over the Holy City and its inhabitants a

“cascade” of consolation, a veritable overflow of consolation – such that it will be overcome – a cascade of maternal tenderness: “You shall be carried upon her hip and dandled upon her knees” (vv. 12). As when a mother takes her child upon her knee and caresses him or her: so the Lord will do and does with us. This is the cascade of tenderness which gives us much consolation. “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you” (v. 13). Every Christian, and especially you and I, is called to be a bearer of this message of hope that gives serenity and joy: God’s consolation, his tenderness towards all. But if we first experience the joy of being consoled by him, of being loved by him, then we can bring that joy to others. This is important if our mission is to be fruitful: to feel God’s consolation and to pass it on to others! I have occasionally met consecrated persons who are afraid of the consolations of God, and ... the poor things, they were tormented, because they are of this divine tenderness. But be not afraid. Do not be afraid, because the Lord is the Lord of consolation, he is the Lord of tenderness. The Lord is a Father and he says that he will be for us like a mother with her baby, with a mother’s tenderness. Do not be afraid of the consolations of the Lord. Isaiah’s invitation must resound in our hearts: “Comfort, comfort my people” (40:1) and this must lead to mission. We must find the Lord who consoles us and go to console the people of God. This is the mission. People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God’s consolation to others!

2. The second reference point of mission is the Cross of Christ. Saint Paul, writing to the Galatians, says: “Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). And he speaks of the “marks of Jesus”, that is, the wounds of the crucified Lord, as a countersign, as the distinctive mark of his life as an Apostle of the Gospel. In his ministry Paul experienced suffering, weakness and defeat, but also joy and consolation. This is the Paschal mystery of Jesus: the mystery of death and resurrection. And it was precisely by letting himself be conformed to the death of Jesus that Saint Paul became a sharer in his resurrection, in his victory. In the hour of darkness, in the hour of trial, the dawn of light and salvation is already present and operative. The Paschal mystery is the beating heart of the Church’s mission! And if we remain within this mystery, we are sheltered both from a worldly and triumphalistic view of mission and from the discouragement that can result from trials and failures. Pastoral fruitfulness, the fruitfulness of the Gospel proclamation is measured neither by success nor by failure according to the criteria of human evaluation, but by becoming conformed to the logic of the Cross of Jesus, which is the logic of stepping outside oneself and spending oneself, the logic of love. It is the Cross – always the Cross that is present with Christ, because at times we are offered the Cross without Christ: this has no purpose! – it is the Cross, and always the Cross with Christ, which guarantees the fruitfulness of our mission. And it is from the Cross, the supreme act of mercy and love, that we are reborn as a “new creation” (*Gal* 6:15).

3. Finally the third element: prayer. In the Gospel we heard: “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest, to send out labourers into his harvest” (*Lk* 10:2). The labourers for the harvest are not chosen through advertising campaigns or appeals of service and generosity, but they are “chosen”

and “sent” by God. It is he who chooses, it is he who sends, it is Lord who sends, it is he who gives the mission. For this, prayer is important. The Church, as Benedict XVI has often reiterated, is not ours, but God’s; and how many times do we, consecrated men and women, think that the Church is ours! We make of it... something that we invent in our minds. But it is not ours!, it is God’s. The field to be cultivated is his. The mission is grace. And if the Apostle is born of prayer, he finds in prayer the light and strength of his action. Our mission ceases to bear fruit, indeed, it is extinguished the moment the link with its source, with the Lord, is interrupted.

Dear seminarians, dear novices, dear young people discerning your vocations. One of you, one of your formators, said to me the other days, “*evangeliser, on le fait à genoux*” “evangelization is done on one’s knees”. Listen well: “evangelization is done on one’s knees”. Without a constant relationship with God, the mission becomes a job. But for what do you work? As a tailor, a cook a priest, is your job being a priest, being a sister? No. It is not a job, but rather something else. The risk of activism, of relying too much on structures, is an ever-present danger. If we look towards Jesus, we see that prior to any important decision or event he recollected himself in intense and prolonged prayer. Let us cultivate the contemplative dimension, even amid the whirlwind of more urgent and heavy duties. And the more the mission calls you to go out to the margins of existence, let your heart be the more closely united to Christ’s heart, full of mercy and love. Herein lies the secret of pastoral fruitfulness, of the fruitfulness of a disciple of the Lord!

Jesus sends his followers out with no “purse, no bag, no sandals” (*Lk 10:4*). The spread of the Gospel is not guaranteed either by the number of persons, or by the prestige of the institution, or by the quantity of available resources. What counts is to be permeated by the love of Christ, to let oneself be led by the Holy Spirit and to graft one’s own life onto the tree of life, which is the Lord’s Cross.

Dear friends, with great confidence I entrust you to the intercession of Mary Most Holy. She is the Mother who helps us to take life decisions freely and without fear. May she help you to bear witness to the joy of God’s consolation, without being afraid of joy, she will help you to conform yourselves to the logic of love of the Cross, to grow in ever deeper union with the Lord in prayer. Then your lives will be rich and fruitful! Amen.