



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Vatican Basilica - Altar of the Chair
Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Easter, 12 May 2015*

[Multimedia]

The Reading from the Acts of the Apostles that we have just heard (16: 22-34) presents a rather special character. It is the jailer of the prison in Philippi, where Paul and Silas are locked up after an uprising of the crowd against them. The magistrates first have them beaten and then send them to prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. This is why that man, during the night, feels the earthquake and, seeing the prison doors open, despairs and considers killing himself. But Paul reassures him and the jailer, trembling and full of wonder, kneels in supplication for salvation.

The narrative tells us that at once that man takes the essential steps of the path of faith and salvation: he listens to the Word of the Lord, together with his household; he washes the wounds of Paul and Silas; he receives Baptism, with all his family; and lastly welcomes Paul and Silas into his house, prepares the table and sets food before them, rejoicing. The entire path of faith.

The Gospel, proclaimed and believed, urges one to wash the feet and wounds of the suffering and to prepare the table for them. The simplicity of gestures, in which receiving the Word and the Sacrament of Baptism accompanies the welcoming of one's brother, which is treated as a single act: welcoming God and welcoming another; welcoming others with the grace of God; welcoming God and making Him manifest in service to one's brother. Word, Sacraments and service each evoke and enrich the another, as previously seen in these witnesses of the early Church.

We can see in this gesture the entire call of *Caritas*. *Caritas* is now a great Confederation, widely

recognized also in the world for its accomplishments. *Caritas* is the Church in many parts of the world, and must also spread even more in the various parishes and communities, to renew what took place in the early times of the Church. Indeed the root of all your service actually lies in the simple and obedient welcoming of God and neighbour. This is the root. Should this root be removed, *Caritas* would die. This welcoming is accomplished within you personally, because you then go into the world, and there you serve in the name of Christ whom you have met and whom you meet in every brother and sister to whom you draw near. For this very reason it avoids being reduced to a simple humanitarian organization. The *Caritas* of each particular Church, even the smallest, is the same: there is no such thing as large *Caritas* and small *Caritas*, they are all equal. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to understand the true dimension of *Caritas*; the grace to avoid falling into the mistaken belief that a well organized centralism is the way; the grace to understand that *Caritas* is always at the periphery, in each particular Church; and the grace to believe that the central *Caritas* is only a help, a service and an experience of communion and not the headquarters of the others.

One who lives the *Caritas* mission is not a simple worker but indeed a witness to Christ. A person who seeks Christ and allows himself be sought by Christ; a person who loves with the spirit of Christ, the spirit of giving freely, the spirit of giving. All of our strategies and planning stand empty if we do not bear this love within us. Not our love, but his. Or better yet, our love purified and strengthened by his.

This is how one can serve all and prepare the table for all. This too is a beautiful image that the Word of God offers us today: preparing the table. God prepares the table of the Eucharist for us, even now. *Caritas* prepares many tables for those who are hungry. In these months you have carried out the great campaign “*One Human Family, Food For All*”. So many people even today hope to have enough to eat. The planet has food for all, but the will to share with everyone seems to be lacking. To prepare the table for all, and to ask that there be one table for all. Doing whatever we can so that everyone has food, but also reminding the world’s powerful that God will call them to be judged one day, and it will be demonstrated whether they have truly tried to provide food for Him in each person (cf. Mt 25:35) and whether they have acted in order that the environment would not be destroyed but would be able to produce this food.

In considering the table of the Eucharist, we cannot forget those of our Christian brothers and sisters who through violence have been deprived of both food for their bodies and for their souls: they have been pushed from their homes and from their churches, at times destroyed. I renew the appeal that these people and these intolerable injustices not be forgotten.

Together with so many other charitable Church organizations, *Caritas* thus reveals the power of Christian love and the desire of the Church to meet Jesus in each person, especially when he/she is poor or suffering. This is the journey we have before us and with this horizon I hope that you may carry out the works of these times. Let us entrust them to the Virgin Mary, who made

welcoming God and neighbour the fundamental criterion of her life. Tomorrow we will celebrate Our Lady of Fatima, who appeared to proclaim victory over evil. With such great support let us not be afraid to continue our mission. So be it.