



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO ECUADOR, BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY
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HOLY MASS AT CAMPO GRANDE

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Nu Guazú, Asunción (Paraguay)
Sunday, 12 July 2015

[Multimedia]

“The Lord will shower down blessings, and our land will yield its increase”. These are the words of the Psalm. We are invited to celebrate this mysterious communion between God and his People, between God and us. The rain is a sign of his presence, in the earth tilled by our hands. It reminds us that our communion with God always brings forth fruit, always gives life. This confidence is born of faith, from knowing that we depend on grace, which will always transform and nourish our land.

It is a confidence which is learned, which is taught. A confidence nurtured within a community, in the life of a family. A confidence which radiates from the faces of all those people who encourage us to follow Jesus, to be disciples of the One who can never deceive. A disciple knows that he or she is called to have this confidence; we feel Jesus’s invitation to be his friend, to share his lot, his very life. “No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you”. The disciples are those who learn how to live trusting in the friendship offered by Jesus.

The Gospel speaks to us of this kind of discipleship. It shows us the identity card of the Christian. Our calling card, our credentials.

Jesus calls his disciples and sends them out, giving them clear and precise instructions. He

challenges them to take on a whole range of attitudes and ways of acting. Sometimes these can strike us as exaggerated or even absurd. It would be easier to interpret these attitudes symbolically or “spiritually”. But Jesus is quite precise, very clear. He doesn’t tell them simply to do whatever they think they can.

Let us think about some of these attitudes: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money...” “When you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place” (cf. *Mk* 6:8-11). All this might seem quite unrealistic.

We could concentrate on the words, “bread”, “money”, “bag”, “staff”, “sandals” and “tunic”. And this would be fine. But it strikes me that one key word can easily pass unnoticed among the challenging words I have just listed. It is a word at the heart of Christian spirituality, of our experience of discipleship: “welcome”. Jesus as the good master, the good teacher, sends them out to be welcomed, to experience hospitality. He says to them: “Where you enter a house, stay there”. He sends them out to learn one of the hallmarks of the community of believers. We might say that a Christian is someone who has learned to welcome others, who has learned to show hospitality.

Jesus does not send them out as men of influence, landlords, officials armed with rules and regulations. Instead, he makes them see that the Christian journey is simply about changing hearts. One’s own heart first all, and then helping to transform the hearts of others. It is about learning to live differently, under a different law, with different rules. It is about turning from the path of selfishness, conflict, division and superiority, and taking instead the path of life, generosity and love. It is about passing from a mentality which domineers, stifles and manipulates to a mentality which welcomes, accepts and cares.

These are two contrasting mentalities, two ways of approaching our life and our mission.

How many times do we see mission in terms of plans and programs. How many times do we see evangelization as involving any number of strategies, tactics, maneuvers, techniques, as if we could convert people on the basis of our own arguments. Today the Lord says to us quite clearly: in the mentality of the Gospel, you do not convince people with arguments, strategies or tactics. You convince them by simply learning how to welcome them.

The Church is a mother with an open heart. She knows how to welcome and accept, especially those in need of greater care, those in greater difficulty. The Church, as desired by Jesus, is the home of hospitality. And how much good we can do, if only we try to speak this language of hospitality, this language of receiving and welcoming. How much pain can be soothed, how much despair can be allayed in a place where we feel at home! This requires open doors, especially the doors of our heart. Welcoming the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner (*Mt* 25:34-37), the leper and the paralytic. Welcoming those who do not think as we do,

who do not have faith or who have lost it. And sometimes, we are to blame. Welcoming the persecuted, the unemployed. Welcoming the different cultures, of which our earth is so richly blessed. Welcoming sinners, because each one of us is also a sinner.

So often we forget that there is an evil underlying our sins, that precedes our sins. There is a bitter root which causes damage, great damage, and silently destroys so many lives. There is an evil which, bit by bit, finds a place in our hearts and eats away at our life: it is isolation. Isolation which can have many roots, many causes. How much it destroys our life and how much harm it does us. It makes us turn our back on others, God, the community. It makes us closed in on ourselves. From here we see that the real work of the Church, our mother, should not be mainly about managing works and projects, but rather about learning to experience fraternity with others. A welcome-filled fraternity is the best witness that God is our Father, for “by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn 13:35*).

In this way, Jesus teaches us a new way of thinking. He opens before us a horizon brimming with life, beauty, truth and fulfillment.

God never closes off horizons; he is never unconcerned about the lives and sufferings of his children. God never allows himself to be outdone in generosity. So he sends us his Son, he gives him to us, he hands him over, he shares him... so that we can learn the way of fraternity, of self-giving. In a definitive way, he opens up a new horizon; he is a new word which sheds light on so many situations of exclusion, disintegration, loneliness and isolation. He is a word which breaks the silence of loneliness.

And when we are weary or worn down by our efforts to evangelize, it is good to remember that the life which Jesus holds out to us responds to the deepest needs of people. “We were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 265).

One thing is sure: we cannot force anyone to receive us, to welcome us; this is itself part of our poverty and freedom. But neither can anyone force us not to be welcoming, hospitable in the lives of our people. No one can tell us not to accept and embrace the lives of our brothers and sisters, especially those who have lost hope and zest for life. How good it would be to think of our parishes, communities, chapels, wherever there are Christians, with open doors, true centers of encounter between ourselves and God.

The Church is a mother, like Mary. In her, we have a model. We too must provide a home, like Mary, who did not lord it over the word of God, but rather welcomed that word, bore it in her womb and gave it to others.

We too must provide a home, like the earth, which does not choke the seed, but receives it,

nourishes it and makes it grow.

That is how we want to be Christians, that is how we want to live the faith on this Paraguayan soil, like Mary, accepting and welcoming God's life in our brothers and sisters, in confidence and with the certainty that "the Lord will shower down blessings, and our land will yield its increase". May it be so.