



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE CONGOLESE COMMUNITY *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS*

*Altar of the Cathedra in the Vatican Basilica
Sunday, 1 December 2019*

[Multimedia]

Pope Francis: *Boboto* [peace]

Assembly: *Bondeko* [brotherhood]

Pope Francis: *Bondeko*

Assembly: *Esengo* [joy]

In today's Readings a verb appears — *to come* — which recurs three times in the First Reading, while the Gospel ends by saying that “the Son of man *is coming*...” (Mt 24:44). Jesus comes: Advent already reminds us of this certainty by its name, because the word *Advent* means *coming or arrival*. The Lord comes: this is the root of our hope, the certainty that God's comfort reaches us in the midst of the tribulations of the world, a comfort that does not consist of words but rather of presence, of his presence that comes among us.

The Lord comes; today, the first day of the Liturgical Year, this proclamation marks our starting point: we know that over and above every favourable or adverse event, the Lord does not leave us on our own. He came 2,000 years ago and he will come again at the end of time, but he also comes today into my life and into yours. Yes, this life of ours, with all its problems, anxiety and uncertainty, is visited by the Lord. This is the source of our joy: the Lord has never tired and will never tire of us, he wants to come, he wants to visit us.

Today the verb *to come* is not only conjugated for God but also for us. Indeed, in the First Reading Isaiah prophesies: “Many peoples *shall come*, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord’” (2:3). While the evil on earth stems from the fact that each person follows his or her own path without the others, the Prophet offers a marvellous vision: everyone comes together on the mountain of the Lord. The temple, the house of God, stood on the mountain. Isaiah thus passes

on to us an invitation to his house from God. We are God's guests, and those who are invited are expected, they are welcome. "Come", God says, "because there is room for everyone in my house. Come, because in my heart there is not only one people but every people".

Dear brothers and sisters, you have come from far away. You have left your homes, you have left your dear ones and things that are dear to you. Having arrived here you have found a welcome, together with difficulties and unexpected events. Yet for God you are always appreciated guests. For him we are never strangers but awaited children. And the Church is God's house: may you therefore always feel at home here. We come here in order *to walk together* towards the Lord and to put into practice the words with which Isaiah's prophecy ends: "*Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord*" (v. 5).

But we may prefer the darkness of the world to the light of the Lord and we might answer, "no, I am not coming" to the Lord who invites us to go with him. It is often not a direct "no", brazen, but deceitful. It is the "no" which Jesus warns us against in the Gospel, exhorting us not to do as in "the days of Noah" (Mt 24:37). What happened in Noah's days? What occurred was that while something new and overwhelming was about to happen, no one paid any attention to it because they were all just thinking of eating and drinking (cf. v. 38). In other words they were all reducing life to their own needs, they were content with a flat, horizontal life with no enthusiasm. There was no *expectation* for someone, only the *demand* for something for themselves, something to consume. *Expectation* of the Lord who comes, and not the *demand* for something for us to consume. This is consumerism.

Consumerism is a virus that tarnishes faith at its root, because it makes you believe that life depends solely on what you have, and so you forget God who approaches you and who is beside you. The Lord comes, but you prefer to follow the longing you feel; your brother knocks at your door, but he is a nuisance to you because he upsets your plans — and this is the attitude of consumerism. In the Gospel, when Jesus points out the dangers of faith, he is not thinking of powerful enemies, hostility and persecution. All these things have been and will be, but they do not weaken faith. The true danger instead is what anaesthetizes the heart: it is dependence on consumption, it is letting things burden and dissipate the heart (cf. Lk 21:34).

Therefore people live on things and no longer know what they live for; they have so many possessions but no longer do good; homes are filled with things but are empty of children. This, the demographic winter we are suffering, is the drama we face today: homes full of things but without children. Time is wasted on pastimes, but people have no time for God and for others. And when we live for things, things are never enough, greed increases and others get in the way and people end up feeling threatened and, as they are ever dissatisfied and angry, the level of hatred rises, "I want more, I want more, I want more...". We see this today wherever consumerism holds sway: how much violence there is, even if it is only verbal, what anger and what a desire to seek an enemy at all costs! Thus while the world is full of lethal weapons we do not realize that we are

continuing to arm our hearts with rage.

Jesus wants to reawaken us from all this. He does so with a verb: “Watch” (Mt 24:42). “Be careful, keep watch”. Watching was the task of the sentinel, who stayed awake to keep watch while everyone else was asleep. Keeping watch means not giving in to the sleep that enfolds everyone. In order to watch it is necessary to have a sure hope: that the night will not last for ever, that dawn will soon break. And so it is for us: God comes and his light will brighten even the thickest darkness. But today it is our task to watch, to keep watch: to overcome the temptation of thinking that life means accumulating — this is a temptation, the meaning of life is not to accumulate, it is up to us to unmask the deception that we are happy when we have many things, to resist the dazzling lights of consumerism, which shine everywhere this month, and to believe that prayer and charity are not time wasted but rather the greatest of treasures.

When we open our hearts to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters we usher in the precious good which things will never be able to give us and which Isaiah proclaims in the First Reading, *peace*: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is 2:4). These are words that also make us think of your homeland. Today let us pray for peace, seriously threatened in the East of the country, especially in the territories of Beni and Minembwe, where conflicts flare up, stoked from outside too, by the complicit silence of so many. Conflicts fuelled by those who get rich by selling arms.

Today you are commemorating a most beautiful figure, Blessed Marie-Clémentine Anuarite Nengapeta, violently killed but not before having said to her executioner, as did Jesus, “I forgive you, for you do not know what you do”! Let us ask for her intercession so that, in the name of God-Love and with the help of the neighbouring peoples, weapons may be cast aside, for a future which will no longer be some against others but rather some with others, and which will change from an economy that serves war to an economy that serves peace.

Pope Francis: He who has ears to hear

Assembly: Let him hear!

Pope Francis: He who has the heart to understand

Assembly: Let him understand!