



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND SOUTH SUDAN
(ECUMENICAL PEACE PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH SUDAN)
[31 January - 5 February 2023]

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

"John Garang" Mausoleum (Juba)
Sunday, 5 February 2023

[Multimedia]

Today I would like to make my own the words that the Apostle Paul addressed to the community of Corinth in the second reading and repeat them here before you: "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:1-2). Yes, Paul's concern is also mine, as I gather here with you in the name of Jesus Christ, the God of love, the God who achieved peace through his cross; Jesus, the God crucified for us all; Jesus, crucified in those who suffer; Jesus, crucified in the lives of so many of you, in so many people in this country; Jesus, the risen Lord, the victor over evil and death. I have come here to proclaim him and to confirm you in him, for the message of Christ is a message of hope. Jesus knows your anguish and the hope you bear in your hearts, the joys and struggles that mark your lives, the darkness that assails you and the faith that, like a song in the night, you raise to heaven. Jesus knows you and loves you. If we remain in him, we must never fear, because for us too, every cross will turn into a resurrection, every sadness into hope, and every lament into dancing.

I would like to reflect, then, on the words of life that our Lord Jesus spoke to us in today's Gospel: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14). What do these images

say to us, as disciples of Christ?

First of all, that *we are the salt of the earth*. Salt is used to season food. It is the unseen ingredient that gives flavour to everything. Precisely for this reason, since ancient times, salt has been a symbol of wisdom, a virtue that cannot be seen, but that adds zest to life, which without it becomes insipid, tasteless. Yet what kind of wisdom does Jesus mean? He uses the image of salt immediately after teaching his disciples the Beatitudes. We see, then, that the Beatitudes are the salt of the Christian life, because they bring the wisdom of heaven down to earth. They revolutionize the standards of this world and our usual way of thinking. And what do they say? In a word, they tell us that to be blessed, to be happy and fulfilled, we must not aim to be strong, rich and powerful, but humble, meek, merciful; to do no evil to anyone, but to be peacemakers for everyone. This, Jesus says, is the wisdom of a disciple; it is what gives flavour to the world around us. Let us remember this: if we put the Beatitudes into practice, if we embody the wisdom of Christ, we will give savour not only to our own lives, but also to the life of society and of the country in which we live.

Salt does not only bring out flavor; it also has another function, which was essential at the time of Christ: it preserves food so that it does not spoil and go bad. The Bible had said that there is one “food”, one essential good that is to be preserved above all others, and that is the covenant with God. So in those days, whenever an offering was made to the Lord, a little salt was added to it. Let us hear what Scripture says about this: “You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (*Lev 2:13*). Salt thus served as a reminder of our basic need to preserve our relationship with God, because he is faithful to us, and his covenant with us is incorruptible, inviolable and enduring (cf. *Num 18:19*; *2 Chr 13:5*). It follows that every disciple of Jesus, as the salt of the earth, is a witness to the covenant that God has made and that we celebrate in every Mass: a new, eternal and unbreakable covenant (cf. *1 Cor 11:25*; *Heb 9*), and a love for us that cannot be shaken even by our infidelity.

Brothers and sisters, we are witnesses to this wonder. In ancient times, when people or peoples established a pact of friendship with one another, they often sealed it by exchanging a little salt. As the salt of the earth, we are called to bear witness to the covenant with God with joy and gratitude, and thus show that we are people capable of creating bonds of friendship and fraternal living. People capable of building good human relationships as a way of curbing the corruption of evil, the disease of division, the filth of fraudulent business dealings and the plague of injustice.

Today I would like to thank you, because you are the salt of the earth in this country. Yet, when you consider its many wounds, the violence that increases the venom of hatred, and the injustice that causes misery and poverty, you may feel small and powerless. Whenever that temptation assails you, try looking at salt and its tiny grains. Salt is a tiny ingredient and, once placed on food, it disappears, it dissolves; yet precisely in that way it seasons the whole dish. In the same way,

even though we are tiny and frail, even when our strength seems paltry before the magnitude of our problems and the blind fury of violence, we Christians are able to make a decisive contribution to changing history. Jesus wants us to be like salt: a mere pinch dissolves and gives a different flavour to everything. Consequently, we cannot step back, because without that little pinch, without our small contribution, everything becomes insipid. So let us start from the little things, the essential things, not from what may appear in the history books, but from what changes history. In the name of Jesus and of his Beatitudes, let us lay down the weapons of hatred and revenge, in order to take up those of prayer and charity. Let us overcome the dislikes and aversions that over time have become chronic and risk pitting tribes and ethnic groups against one another. Let us learn to apply the salt of forgiveness to our wounds; salt burns but it also heals. Even if our hearts bleed for the wrongs we have suffered, let us refuse, once and for all, to repay evil with evil, and we will grow healthy within. Let us accept one another and love one another with sincerity and generosity, as God loves us. Let us cherish the good that we are, and not allow ourselves to be corrupted by evil!

Let us now pass to the second image used by Jesus, which is light: *You are the light of the world*. A great prophecy was told of Israel: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (*Is* 49:6). Now that prophecy has been fulfilled, because God the Father has sent his Son, who is the light of the world (cf. *Jn* 8:12), the true light that enlightens every person and every people, the light that shines in the darkness and dispels every cloud of gloom (cf. *Jn* 1:5.9). Jesus, the light of the world, tells his disciples that they, too, are *the light of the world*. This means that, when we receive the light of Christ, the light that is Christ, we become "luminous"; we radiate the light of God!

Jesus goes on to say: "A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house" (*Mt* 5:15). Again, this was a familiar image in those days. Many villages in Galilee were built on hillsides and were visible from a great distance. Lamps in houses were placed high up, so that they could illumine all the corners of a room. When a lamp was extinguished, it was covered with a piece of terracotta called a "bushel", which deprived the flame of oxygen and thus put out its light.

Brothers and sisters, it is clear what Jesus means by asking us to be the light of the world: we, who are his disciples, are called to shine forth like a city set on a hill, like a lamp whose flame may never be extinguished. In other words, before we worry about the darkness surrounding us, before we hope that the shadows around us will lighten, we are called to radiate light, to give brightness to our cities, our villages and homes, our acquaintances and all our daily activities by our lives and good works. The Lord will give us strength, the strength to be light in him, so that everyone will see our good works, and seeing them, as Jesus reminds us, they will rejoice in God and give him glory. If we live like sons and daughters, brothers and sisters on earth, people will come to know that all of us have a Father in heaven. We are being asked, then, to burn with love, never to let our light be extinguished, never to let the oxygen of charity fade from our lives so that the works of evil

can take away the pure air of our witness. This country, so beautiful yet ravaged by violence, needs the light that each one of you has, or better, the light that each one of you is.

Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you will be salt that spreads, dissolves and seasons South Sudan with the fraternal taste of the Gospel. May your Christian communities shine radiantly, so that, like cities built on a hill, they will shed the light of goodness on all and show that it is beautiful and possible to live with generosity and self-giving, to have hope, and together to build a reconciled future. Brothers and sisters, I am with you and I assure you of my prayer that you will experience the joy of the Gospel, the savour and the light that the Lord, “the God of peace” (*Phil* 4:9), the “God of all consolation” (*2 Cor* 1:3), desires to pour out upon every one of you.

Final Remarks of His Holiness Pope Francis

Thank you, dear brother Stephen, for your kind words. I greet the President of the Republic, as well as the civil and religious authorities present.

I have now come to the end of this pilgrimage among you, and I want to express my gratitude for the warm welcome given me and for all the work done to prepare for this visit, which was a fraternal visit of three.

I am grateful to all of you, brothers and sisters, who have come here in great numbers from various places, spending many hours, if not days, on the road! I thank you for the affection you have shown me, but also for your faith and your patience, for the good you do and the hardships that you willingly offer to God without growing discouraged but continuing to move forward. South Sudan possesses a courageous Church, with close ties to the Church in Sudan, as the Archbishop noted in referring to [Saint Josephine Bakhita](#), a great woman who by God’s grace transformed into hope all the sufferings that she endured. As Pope Benedict observed: “The hope born in her which had ‘redeemed’ her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody” (*Spe Salvi*, 3). Hope is the word I would leave with each of you, as a gift to share, a seed to bear fruit. As Saint Josephine reminds us, women, especially here, are a sign of hope, and in a special way I thank and bless all the women of the country.

To hope, I would associate another word, the word that has echoed in these days: *peace*. I came here with my brothers Justin and Iain, whom I sincerely thank; the three of us jointly will continue to accompany your steps and do all we can to make them steps of peace, steps to peace. I would like to entrust this path of the entire people together with the three of us, this path of reconciliation and peace, to another woman. She is our most loving Mother Mary, Queen of Peace. She has accompanied us with her caring and quiet presence. We pray to her now, and we entrust to her the cause of peace in South Sudan and in the entire African continent. To Our Lady we also entrust peace in our world, especially in the many countries at war, like Ukraine, which suffers so

greatly.

Dear brothers and sisters, the three of us are returning to our own homes, with you even closer to our hearts. Let me repeat: you are in our hearts, you are in our hearts, you are in the hearts of Christians worldwide! Never lose hope. And lose no opportunity to build peace. May hope and peace dwell among you. May hope and peace dwell in South Sudan!

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