



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
to PORTUGAL
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXXVII WORLD YOUTH DAY
(2 - 6 August 2023)

VESPERS WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, DEACONS, CONSECRATED PERSONS,
SEMINARIANS AND PASTORAL WORKERS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

"Mosteiro dos Jerónimos" (Lisbon)
Wednesday, 2 August 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brother Bishops,
Dear priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, seminarians,
Dear pastoral workers,
Dear brothers and sisters, good evening!

I am pleased to be with you, not only to experience World Youth Day together with so many young people, but also to share in your own ecclesial journey, your challenges and your hopes. I thank Bishop José Ornelas Carvalho for his kind words. This evening I would like to join you in prayer, so that, as the Bishop said, along with the young people we can boldly embrace "the dream of God and blaze trails towards a joyful, generous and transforming participation, for the Church and for humanity". This is no joke. It is a programme.

I find myself immersed in the beauty of your country, a land of passage between past and future, a place of ancient traditions and of great changes, embellished by verdant valleys and golden beaches that face the boundless beauty of the ocean that borders Portugal. This makes me think

of the first calling of the disciples: those whom Jesus called on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. I would like to dwell on that call, which reminds us of what we just heard in the brief reading of these Vespers: the Lord has saved us and has called us, not according to our works but according to his grace (cf. *2 Tim* 1:9). This was the case in the lives of those first disciples when Jesus, as he passed by, “saw two boats there at the shore of the lake. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets” (*Lk* 5:2). Jesus then got into Simon’s boat and, after teaching the crowds, changed the life of those fishers by inviting them to put out into the deep water and let down their nets. We immediately note the contrast: the fishers *leave the boat to wash their nets*, that is, to clean and repair them, and then to return home, whereas *Jesus gets into the boat and invites them to let down their nets for a catch*. We see the difference: the disciples get out of the boat, while Jesus gets into the boat; they want to put away their nets, while he wants them to lower them once more into the sea for a catch.

To start, the fishers are getting out of the boat to wash their nets. Jesus sees this and stops. Shortly before, he had inaugurated his preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth, but his townsfolk had chased him out of the city and even sought to kill him (cf. *Lk* 4:28-30). He then left the sacred precincts and began to preach the word among the people, on the streets where the men and women of his time lived and worked each day. Christ wanted to bring God’s closeness into the very places and situations in which people live, work and hope, sometimes clinging to their past failures and their shortcomings, precisely like those fishermen who had laboured throughout the night and caught nothing. Jesus looks sympathetically upon Simon and his companions who, tired and disappointed, were routinely washing their nets, resigned to the fact that they would return home empty-handed.

There are moments in our ecclesial journey when we can feel a similar weariness, when we seem to be holding only empty nets. Weariness. Someone once said, “I am afraid when good people grow weary”. At those times when we think we are holding only empty nets. It is not uncommon to feel that way in countries of ancient Christian tradition, buffeted by social and cultural changes and increasingly marked by secularism, indifference to God and growing detachment from the practice of the faith. Here lies the peril of a creeping worldliness. It is often accentuated by the disappointment or the anger with which some people view the Church, at times due to our poor witness and the scandals that have marred her face and call us to a humble, ongoing purification, starting with the anguished cry of the victims, who must always be accepted and listened to. Whenever we feel discouraged (and here each of us can think of times when we felt discouraged), we may feel tempted to *leave the boat* and become entangled in the nets of resignation and pessimism. Instead, let us trust that Jesus continues to take us by the hand, lifting up his beloved Bride. Let us bring our struggles and our tears to the Lord, in order then to respond to pastoral and spiritual needs, together, with open hearts and finding new ways to follow him. When we feel discouraged, whether consciously or not, we “retire”, we step back from apostolic zeal, begin to lose it and to become “functionaries of the sacristy”. How sad it is when a person who consecrated his or her life to God becomes a “functionary”, nothing more than an administrator. Sad indeed.

As soon as the apostles get out of the boat to wash their nets, Jesus gets into the boat and calls them to *lower their nets once more*. At moments of discouragement, when we want to “retire”, let us allow Jesus to get into the boat again, with the excitement of the beginnings, an excitement that must be regained, reborn and relived. He comes to us amid our feelings of solitude and our crises, in order to help us begin anew. The spirituality of new beginnings. Do not be afraid of this. For that is how life is: we fail and we start over, we grow weary and we find renewed joy. We put our hands into the hands of Jesus. Today too he stands at the shore of our lives, to revive our hope and to say to us, as he did to Simon and the others: “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” (Lk 5:4). And when we lose excitement, we find a thousand justifications not to lower the nets, and particularly that sullen resignation that is like a worm eating into the soul. Brothers and sisters, we are surely living in difficult times, we know that, but the Lord is asking this Church: “Do you want to leave the boat and plunge into disappointment, or will you let me enter and allow the newness of my words once more to take the helm? He is asking you, priests, consecrated men and women, bishops: Do you want only to preserve the past which lies behind you, or do you want once again to lower the nets with enthusiasm for the catch?” That is what the Lord is asking us: *to revive our “restless” enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel*.

When we become creatures of habit and grow bored, and the mission becomes a “job”, it is time to open our hearts to that second call of Jesus, for he never stops calling us. He calls us to make us set out; he calls us to remake us. Do not be afraid of this second call of Jesus. It is no illusion: he keeps knocking on our door. And we can say that we experience a “good” restlessness when we let ourselves be enticed by this second call of Jesus. A good restlessness, which the immensity of the ocean holds out to you, dear Portuguese friends: an impulse to set out from the shore, not to conquer the world – or simply to fish for *bacalos* – but to make the world exult in the comforting joy of the Gospel. Here we can think of the words of one of your great missionaries, Father António Vieira, known as “*Paiaçu*”, “great Father”. He once said that God gave you a small land for your birth but by making you gaze at the ocean, he gave you an entire world for which to die: “To be born, a small land; to die, the whole world; to be born in Portugal, to die, the whole world” (A. VIEIRA, *Homilies*, vol. III, t. VII, Porto, 1959, p. 69). To lower the nets anew and to embrace the whole world with the hope brought by the Gospel: that is what we are called to do! This is not the time to stop, and give up, to drag the boat to shore or to look back. We must not take flight from the present out of fear, or take refuge in forms and practices of the past. Now is the God-given time of grace to sail boldly into the sea of evangelization and of mission.

To do this, however, we also need to make certain decisions. I would like to indicate three of those decisions, inspired by the Gospel.

First, *to put out into the deep*. With courage. Don’t be hesitant! Put out into the deep. In order to lower the nets anew, we must set out and leave behind the shores of our disappointments and our inertia; we must leave behind the faint melancholy and the cynicism and irony that can often beset us in the face of difficulties. Faint melancholy, cynicism and irony. Let us examine our consciences

on this point. To recover excitement, now in a “second edition”, more mature and the fruit of failures and weariness. It is not easy to acquire an adult excitement. Yet it has to be done if we are to pass *from defeatism to faith*, like Simon, who even after struggling vainly all night, was able to say: “At your word, I will let down the nets” (Lk 5:5). To entrust ourselves each day to the Lord and his word, however, words are not enough; much prayer is also necessary.

Here I would like to ask a question, which everyone can respond in his or her heart: How do I pray? As a “blah, blah, blah”, half asleep before the tabernacle because I don’t know how to talk to the Lord. Do I pray? How do I pray? Only in adoration, only in the presence of the Lord, do we truly rediscover our taste and passion for evangelization. Oddly enough, we have lost the prayer of adoration; and everyone, priests, bishops consecrated men and women, need to recover it, this ability to be quiet in the Lord’s presence. Mother Teresa [of Calcutta], busy about so many things in life, never neglected adoration, even at times when her faith was shaken and she wondered if it was all true or not. A similar moment of darkness was also experienced by Therese of the Child Jesus. In prayer, we overcome the temptation to carry out a “ministry of nostalgia and regrets”. Once, in a convent, there was a nun – this really happened – who complained about everything. I forget her name, but the other nuns called her “Sister Lamentation”. How many times do we turn our frustrations and disappointments into complaints! Once we abandon those complaints, we find the strength to put out once more into the deep, without ideologies, without worldliness: the spiritual worldliness that overtakes us and gives rise to clericalism. A clericalism not only of clerics, for clericalized lay persons are worse than clerics. That clericalism is our ruin. As a great spiritual master once said, spiritual worldliness – which provokes clericalism – is one of the worst evils that can come about in the Church. We need to surmount our difficulties without ideologies, without worldliness, impelled by a sole desire: that the Gospel be preached to all people.

Along this path, you yourselves have had many examples. Seeing that we are surrounded by so many young people, I would like to mention a young person from Lisbon, Saint John Brito, a young native of this place, who centuries ago, amid great hardship, set sail for India and began to speak and dress the same way as the people of the places he went, in order to tell them about Jesus. We too are called to lower our nets these days and to dialogue with everyone, proposing the Gospel message, even if it involves risking a few storms. Like the young people who come here from all over the world to take on the giant waves, we too must set out fearlessly. Indeed, we need never fear the open seas, for in the midst of storms and battling oncoming winds, Jesus comes to meet us and says “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” (Mt 14:27). How often have we had this experience? Each of us can answer that question in his or her heart. And if we have not had it, it is because something failed during the storm.

A second decision: *to work together in offering pastoral care*. Together. In the Gospel, Jesus gives Peter the task of putting out into the deep, but then, speaking in the plural, tells the others: “Let down your nets” (Lk 5:4). Peter guides the barque, but others are on board and all of them are called to lower their nets. Together. And when they take in a great catch of fish, they do not think

they can do it alone, or treat the boon as their private possession and property but, as the Gospel tells us, “they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them” (*Lk* 5:7). In this way, they filled two boats, not one. “One” speaks to us of solitude, self-absorption, the illusion of self-sufficiency, whereas “two” speaks of relationship. The Church is synodal: she is communion, mutual assistance and shared journey. That is the aim of the current Synod, which will have its first general assembly in October. On the boat of the Church, there has to be room for everyone: all the baptized are called on board to lower the nets, becoming personally involved in the preaching of the Gospel. Do not forget this word: together! I am deeply touched, whenever I speak about opening apostolic perspectives, by that passage of the Gospel in which the wedding feast of the son is all prepared, and people do not come to it. So, what does the Lord, the master of the feast, say? “Go out to the highways and byways and bring everyone, everyone: the sick, the healthy, young and old, the righteous and sinners. Everyone!” Do not make the Church a customs station, selecting who can enter or not. All, with their past life, their sins, as they are, before God, as they are, before life. All of them. Let us not have customs houses in the Church.

This is a great challenge, especially in those situations where priests and consecrated persons are hard pressed because their numbers are fewer and pastoral demands are increasing. Even so, we can look at this as an opportunity for involving, with fraternal enthusiasm and sound pastoral creativity, the lay faithful. The nets of the first disciples can thus serve as an image of the Church, which is a “network of relationships”, human, spiritual and pastoral. When dialogue, co-responsibility and participation are lacking, the Church grows old. I would put it this way: never a Bishop without his priests and the people of God; never a priest without his brother priests; and all of us together, as Church – priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful – never without others, never without the world. Without worldliness, to be sure, yet not without the world. In the Church, we help each other, we support one another and we feel ourselves called to spread a climate of constructive fraternity beyond our own walls. For that matter, Saint Peter tells us that we are living stones being built into a spiritual house (cf. *1 Pet* 2:5). I would like to add that you, the faithful of Portugal, are also a “*calçada*”; you are the precious stones of that friendly and resplendent pavement on which the Gospel needs to walk: not even one stone can be lacking, otherwise its absence is immediately noted. This is the Church that, with the help of God, we are called to build!

Lastly, a third decision: *to become fishers of men and women*. Do not be afraid. This is not to practice proselytism; it is to proclaim the challenging message of the Gospel. Jesus uses that fine image: fishers of men and women. Jesus entrusts his disciples with the mission of putting out into the sea of the world. In the Scriptures, the sea is often seen as the haunt of malign and adverse powers that human beings are incapable of controlling. So to be “fishers of men and women” and to draw them out of the water means to help them to return to the place from which they have fallen, to save them from the evil that threatens to overwhelm them, to revive them from every form of death. But to do this without proselytism, always with love. One of the signs of certain ecclesial movements that are in trouble is proselytism. When an ecclesial movement or a diocese,

a bishop, a priest, a nun or a lay person engages in proselytism, that is not Christian. It is Christian to invite, to welcome, to help, but without proselytism. The Gospel is a proclamation of life amid the abyss of death, of freedom amid the eddies of enslavement, of light in the depth of darkness. In the words of Saint Ambrose, “the means to be used in apostolic fishing are like nets: for nets do not kill the catch but keep it alive; they drag it from the depths into the light” (*Exp. Luc. IV*, 68-79). There is so much darkness in today’s society, also here in Portugal, everywhere. We seem to have lost a sense of enthusiasm, the courage to dream, the strength to confront challenges and to be confident about the future; and so we sail amid doubts and uncertainty, especially economic uncertainty, an impoverishment of social friendship, and lack of hope. As Church, we are entrusted with the task of putting out into the waters of this sea and casting the nets of the Gospel, not pointing fingers, not accusing, but bringing to the men and women of our time an offer of life, the life of Jesus. We are called to bring to them the openness of the Gospel, to invite them to the party, to a multicultural society; to bring the closeness of the Father to situations of increasing uncertainty and poverty, especially among young people. To bring the love of Christ wherever families are fragile and relationships wounded. To transmit the joy of the Spirit where discouragement and fatalism reign. As one of your authors has written: “To arrive at the infinite, and I do believe that one can arrive there, we need a secure port, just one, from which to set out towards the Indefinite” (F. PESSOA, *Livro do Desassossego*, Lisbon, 1998, 247). Let us dream of the Church in Portugal as a “secure port” for all those who face the straits, the shipwrecks and the tempests of life!

Dear brothers and sisters: to all of you, laity, religious, priests and bishops, to one and all I say, do not be afraid, let down the nets. Do not go about hurling accusations – telling people, “this is a sin” or “this is not a sin”. Let everyone come, we can talk later, but first they should hear the invitation of Jesus; repentance comes later, closeness to Jesus comes later. Please, do not turn the Church into a customs house: there the righteous, peoples whose lives are in order, those properly married, can enter, while everyone else remains outside. No. That is not the Church. Righteous and sinners, good and bad: everyone, everyone, everyone. And then, may the Lord help us to straighten things out... everyone!

I thank you most cordially, brothers and sisters, for listening to me, which must have been boring! I thank you for all that you do, and for your example, above all your hidden example and your perseverance in getting up each day to begin anew or to continue what you began. Thank you for all that you do! I entrust you to Our Lady of Fatima, to the safekeeping of the angel of Portugal and to the protection of your great saints. Here in Lisbon, I think especially of Saint Anthony (whom the Paduans stole from you), a tireless apostle, inspired preacher and faithful disciple of the Gospel, attentive to the ills of society and filled with compassion for the poor. May Saint Anthony intercede for you and obtain for you the joy of a new “miraculous catch of fish”. Then you can tell me about it. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana