



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE BISHOPS APPOINTED OVER THE PAST YEAR

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 10 September 2015*

[Multimedia]

*Dearest Brothers in the Episcopate,
Peace be with you!*

In these days of reflection and sharing, organized by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, I am pleased to be able to greet you with the same words that the Risen Christ addressed to his disciples, gathered in the Upper Room on the evening of the “*day after the Sabbath*” (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

When the night of the Cross and the time of God’s silence had definitively passed, the Risen Christ came, passing through the doors of the disciples’ fears, stood in their midst, showing them the signs of his sacrifice of love, consigning to them the mission he had received from the Father, breathing the Holy Spirit upon them so that they could dispense in the world the forgiveness and mercy of the Father, the first fruits of his Passion. Thus, the disciples recovered themselves. For a brief but dark interval, they had allowed themselves to be scattered by the scandal of the Cross: dismayed, ashamed of their weakness, forgetting their identity as followers of the Lord. Now, to see the face of the Risen Christ puts the fragments of their lives together again. The recognition of his voice made them find once again the peace that was absent from their hearts since they had abandoned him. Stirred by the breath from his lips, they then understood that the mission they received would not crush them.

You are Bishops of the Church, recently called and consecrated. You came from an unrepeatable encounter with the Risen Christ. Crossing the barrier of your helplessness, he has reached you with his presence, although he knows your denials and abandonments, escapes and betrayals. Nevertheless, he has come to you in the Sacrament of the Church and has breathed upon you. It is a protective breath, a breath that unsettles life (which will never be as it was before) although it

calms and consoles like a light breeze, which one cannot possess. I beg you not to domesticate this power, but to let it unsettle your life continually.

Bishops, Witnesses of the Risen Christ

You are, therefore, witnesses of the Risen Christ. This is your primary and indispensable task. It is not the saccharine discourse of the weak and the lost, but the sole treasure that the Church passes down, albeit with frail hands. Entrusted to you is the preaching of the reality that supports the entire edifice of the Church: *Jesus is Risen!* The One who subordinates his life to love could not remain in death. *God the Father has raised Jesus! We, too, will rise again with Christ!*

It is not an obvious nor an easy proclamation. The world is seemingly so pleased with its present state, with what it is seemingly able to guarantee, what it judges useful, that it suppress the demand for what is definitive. Humankind readily loses sight of eternity while, distracted and absorbed, engaged in the present, it puts off what is to come. So many are tacitly resigned to the habit of navigating by sight, to the point that they remove the very reality of the harbour that awaits them. Many are so caught up in cynical calculations for their own survival that they have become indifferent and, not infrequently, impervious to the very possibility of the life that does not die.

And yet we are assailed by questions whose answers can only come from the definitive future. They are, in fact, so challenging that we will not know how to respond, if we dismiss that “*day after the Sabbath*,” overlooking the horizon of eternity that it opens for us, being limited to the amputated logic of the closed present, in which we would remain imprisoned without the light of that day. How can we address the lamentable present if the sense of belonging to the community of the Risen Christ should fade within us? How will we be able to give the world what we have that is most precious? Will we be able to recall the grandeur of human destiny, if the courage to subordinate our life to the love that does not die should weaken within us?

I am thinking of dramatic challenges such as globalization, which brings close what is far and, on the other hand, pushes away what is close; I am thinking of the epochal phenomenon of migration that is upsetting our time; I am thinking of the natural environment, the garden that God has given as a home to human beings and to other creatures and which is threatened by short-sighted and often unbridled exploitation; I am thinking of the dignity and future of human work, of which whole generations are deprived, reduced to statistics; I am thinking of the desertification of relationships, of the widespread evasion of accountability, of indifference to the future, of the growing and frightening closure; of the disorientation of so many young people, and of the loneliness of many elderly. I am certain that each one of you could add to this list of problems.

I do not want to focus on such an agenda of tasks because I do not want to scare you nor scare myself. You are still in your honeymoon phase! As Bishop of Rome who, after laborious discernment, has lent his feeble voice so that the Risen Christ might affiliate you into the Episcopal

College, I would like to consign to you, once again, the joy of the Gospel.

The disciples rejoiced in meeting the living “*Shepherd who was ready to die for his flock*”. You must also rejoice while expending yourselves for your particular Churches. Do not let yourselves be robbed of such a treasure. Always remember that it is the Gospel that protects you and therefore, do not be afraid to go everywhere and to spend time with those whom the Lord has entrusted to you.

As I was able to show in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no sphere in the life of mankind is excluded from the interest of the Pastor’s heart (cf. nn. 14-15; *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 33). Beware of the risk of neglecting the numerous and individual realities of your flock; do not forgo meetings; do not spare the preaching of the living Word of the Lord; invite everyone to the mission.

Bishops as Educators, Spiritual Guides and Catechists

I invite you to be educators, spiritual guides and catechists for *those who are from your home, who take part in your communities and who approach the Eucharist*. Take them by the hand and lead them to Mount Tabor (cf. Lk 9:28-36), guiding them to the knowledge of the mystery they profess, to the splendour of the divine face hidden in the Word which perhaps they are used to hearing without perceiving its power. For those who already walk with you, find places and prepare tents in which the Risen Christ can reveal his splendour. Spare no energy to accompany them on the climb. Do not let them resign themselves to the plain. Gently and carefully remove the wax that slowly collects in their ears, preventing them from hearing God who attests: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (cf. Mt 17:5).

It is joy that attracts, that enchants, that enraptures. Without joy, Christianity deteriorates into fatigue, pure fatigue. Take care of your priests, so that they awaken such enchantment with God in people, so that they always want to remain in his presence, feel nostalgia for his company, desire nothing other than to return to his presence.

There are too many empty words that take men far from themselves, relegate them to the ephemeral and limited to the provisional. Make sure that it is Jesus, God’s beloved, who is the solid nourishment that is continually savoured and assimilated.

Mystagogic Bishops

Second, I have recalled “*the baptized persons who, nevertheless, do not live the exigencies of Baptism*”. Perhaps it has long been presupposed that the earth, onto which the seed of the Gospel fell, was not in need of care. Some have distanced themselves because they were disappointed by the promises of the faith or because the way to reach it seemed too exacting. Many have left slamming the door, reproaching us for our weaknesses and seeking, without entirely succeeding,

to convince themselves that they let themselves be deceived by hopes that in the end remained unfulfilled.

Be Bishops able to cross their path; become seemingly lost wayfarers too (Lk 24:13-35), asking what happened in the Jerusalem of their life and, discreetly letting them pour out their heart grown cold. Do not be scandalized by their sorrows or their disappointments. Illuminate them with the humble flame, guarded with apprehension, but always capable enlightening one who is reached by its brilliance, which, however, is never blinding.

Spend time meeting them on the road to their Emmaus. Dispense words that reveal to them what they are still incapable of seeing: the potential hidden in their own disappointments. Guide them in the mystery that they bear on their lips although without recognizing its power. More than with words, warm their heart by humbly listening, show interest in their true good, so that their eyes may be opened and so change direction and turn to him, from whom they have distanced themselves.

I beg you to remember that they have already known the Lord. Therefore, they must rediscover him because, in the meantime their eyes have been darkened. Help them to recognize their Lord, so that they have the strength to return to Jerusalem. And the faith of the community will be enriched and confirmed by the testimony of their reentry. Be vigilant that the arrogance of the “older children” does not insinuate itself dangerously in your communities, which renders one incapable of rejoicing with the one who “*was lost, and is found*” (Lk 15:24).

Missionary Bishops

As missionary pastors of the freely given salvation of God, also seek *those who do not know Jesus or have always rejected him*. Go in their direction, halt before them and look, without fear or unease, at what type of tree they have climbed (cf. Lk 19:1-10). Do not be afraid to invite them to come down immediately, because the Lord wishes to enter their home today. Make them understand that salvation still passes under the tree of their life, and hasten to walk to their house, filled at times with meaningless things.

It is not true that we can disregard these estranged brothers. We are not allowed to dismiss our anxiety over their fate. Moreover, our concern over their genuine and definitive good could open a breach in the perimeter wall with which they jealously guard their self-sufficiency. Seeing the Lord in us summoning them, perhaps they will have the courage to respond to the divine invitation. If this should happen, our communities will be enriched with what they have to share and our Pastor's heart will rejoice to be able to repeat again: “*Today salvation has come to this house*”. May such a horizon prevail in your Pastor's gaze in the forthcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy that we are preparing to celebrate.

On imparting upon you and upon your Churches the Apostolic Blessing, with great affection and gratitude I bless Cardinal Marc Ouellet and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, and the Congregations that they preside over, as well as the entire body of their staff.