



The Holy See

MEETING WITH THE DIOCESE OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Monday, 14 May 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The work on spiritual afflictions has borne two fruits. Firstly, a [growing awareness of] the truth of our condition as people in need, infirm, emerged in all the parishes and organizations that were called to examine the spiritual afflictions indicated by Msgr De Donatis. Secondly, [the understanding] that, from this adherence to our truth, not only discouragement and frustration have come about, but above all the awareness that the Lord has not stopped being merciful toward us: on this journey he has enlightened us, has supported us, has begun a somewhat unprecedented journey of communion, and all this so that we may continue walking behind him. We have become more aware — due to certain aspects and to certain dynamics emerging from our study — of being a ‘non-people’. This word ‘non-people’ is a biblical word, used a great deal by the prophets. A non-people called to covenant once more with the Lord.

Such keys to understanding lead us back, even if only intuitively, to what was experienced by the people of the ancient covenant, who first allowed themselves to be led by God to become his People. We too can again allow ourselves to be enlightened by the paradigm of Exodus, which recounts precisely how the Lord chose and educated a people to unite to Himself, in order to make of them the instrument of his presence in the world.

As a paradigm for us, the experience of Israel requires a conjugation so as to become a language,

that is, to be understandable and to transmit and bring something to life for us even today. The Word of God, the work of the Lord, seeks someone to join to Himself, to unite: our life. With this people who we are today, he will act with the same fortitude with which he acted in liberating his people and in giving them a new land.

The story of Exodus speaks of slavery, of an exit, of a passage, of a covenant, of temptation/‘murmuring’ and of an entrance. But it is a journey of healing.

Beginning this new phase of an ecclesial journey which, in Rome, certainly does not begin now but rather has lasted 2,000 years, it has been important to ask ourselves — as we have done in these months — what are the forms of slavery — the afflictions, the forms of slavery that take away our freedom — that have ended up rendering us sterile, such as how the Pharaoh wanted Israel: without children who in turn would procreate. This “childlessness” makes me think of the ecclesial community’s capacity for fruitfulness. It is a question I leave with you. Perhaps we should also identify who the Pharaoh is today: this power that insists it is divine and absolute, and that wishes to prevent people from adoring the Lord, from belonging to him, instead rendering them slaves to other powers and to other concerns.

It will be necessary to dedicate some time (perhaps a year?) so that, humbly recognizing our weaknesses and having shared them with the others, we can perceive and experience this fact: there is a gift of mercy and of life fulfillment for us and for all those who live in Rome. This gift is the Father’s good will toward us: us as individuals and us as a people. It is his taking the initiative, his preceding us in confirming that in Christ he has loved us and loves us, that he has our life at heart and we are not creatures abandoned to their enslavement, that everything is for our conversion and for our good: moreover, as Saint Paul says, “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).

The analysis of afflictions has highlighted a general and sound exhaustion of the parishes both in spinning around idly and in having lost the way to follow. Both are poor attitudes that do harm. Spinning idly is a bit like being in a labyrinth; and losing the way is taking the wrong paths.

Perhaps we are closed within ourselves and within our parish world because we have actually disregarded or did not seriously take into consideration the life of the people who were entrusted to us (those in our territory, in the environments of our daily life), while the Lord always manifests himself by becoming flesh *here and now*, that is, also and precisely in this time so difficult to interpret, in this context so complex and seemingly far from him. He made no mistake in putting us here, in this time, and with these challenges to face.

Perhaps this is why we are here in a condition of slavery, that is, of oppressive limitations, of dependency on things that are not the Lord; thinking perhaps that this would suffice or even that this was what he was asking us to do: to stay near the ‘fleshpots’, and to make bricks, which would

then serve to build the storehouses of the Pharaoh, serviceable to the same power that employs slavery.

We settled for what we had: ourselves and our 'pots'. Ourselves: and here there is the great theme of the "hypertrophy of the individual", clearly present in the findings: the 'I' that cannot manage to become a person, to experience relationships, and that believes that relationships with others are not necessary; and our 'pots': that is, our groups, our little social groups, which in the end are revealed to be self-referential, not open to life in its entirety. We have fallen back on concerns of ordinary administration, of survival. How often is this heard: "Priests are busy; they have things to do; they have this, this and that to do...". And people perceive this. "He is a good priest, but why let ourselves be taken up in this mad whirlwind?". It is interesting. It is good that this situation has wearied us; this weariness is a grace of God: it makes us want to get out.

And to get out we need God's call and the presence/company of our neighbour. It is necessary to pay fearless heed to our thirst for God and to the cry that rises up from our people of Rome, asking ourselves: in what sense does this cry express a need for salvation, that is, for God? How does God see and hear that cry? How many situations, among those that have emerged from your findings, truly express that very cry? The invocation that God show himself and draw us out from the impression (or from bitter experience, which makes one 'murmur') that our life is pointless and as if dispossessed by the frenzy of things to do and by time that constantly slips through our fingers; dispossessed by merely utilitarian/commercial and barely gratuitous relationships, by fear of the future; dispossessed also by a faith conceived of only as something to do and not as a liberation that renews us at every step, blessed and happy with the life we live.

As you will have understood, I am inviting you to undertake another step on the journey of the Church of Rome: in a certain sense a new exodus, a new departure, which may renew our identity as the People of God, with no regrets for what we must leave behind.

It will be necessary, as I was saying, to listen to the cry of the people, as Moses was exhorted to do: thus knowing how to interpret, in the light of the Word of God, the social and cultural phenomena in which you are immersed. That is, learning to discern where He is already present, in very ordinary forms of holiness and of communion with him: encountering and accompanying you evermore with the people who are living the Gospel and friendship with the Lord. People who perhaps have not learned the catechism, yet know how to give a sense of faith and hope to life's basic experiences; who have already made their existence with the Lord meaningful, and precisely in those problems, those environments and those situations from which our ordinary pastoral ministry remains normally distant. I think now of Puah and Shiphrah, the two midwives who objected to the Pharaoh's homicidal order and thus impeded the slaughter (cf. Ex 1:8-21). In Rome too, there are certainly women and men who interpret their everyday work as an effort meant to give life to someone and not to take it, and they do so without particular mandates on anyone's part but because "they fear God" and serve him. The life of the people of Israel owes a

great deal to those two women, as our Church owes a great deal to people who remain nameless but who have prepared the coming of God. And the thread of history, the thread of holiness, is brought forth by people whom we do not know: the nameless, those who are hidden and bring everything forward.

To do this it is necessary for our communities to become capable of generating a people — this is important, do not forget it: Church with people, not Church without people —, capable, as it were, of offering and creating relationships in which our people can feel known, recognized, welcomed, well-liked, in other words: not an anonymous part of a whole. A people in which one feels a quality of relationships which is already the beginning of a Promised Land, of an endeavour that the Lord is carrying out for us and with us. Phenomena such as individualism, isolation, fear of existence, social fragmentation and danger ..., typical of all large cities and also present in Rome; in these communities of ours they already have an effective instrument of change. We need not invent another; we ourselves are already this instrument that can be effective provided that we become subject to what I have elsewhere previously called the *revolution of tenderness*.

And if guiding a Christian community is the specific task of an ordained minister, that is, of the parish priest, *pastoral care* is incardinated in Baptism; it blooms from fraternity and is not solely the task of the parish priest and clergy, but of all the baptized. In Rome too, this care, spread and multiplied through relationships, can also generate a *revolution of tenderness*, which will be enriched by the sensitivity, by the gaze, by the past experiences of many.

Keeping this as a foremost pastoral task, we will be able to be the instrument through which we will both experience the action of the Holy Spirit among us (cf. Rom 5:5), and see lives change (cf. Acts 4:32-35). Just as through Moses' humanity God intervened for Israel, likewise the restored and reconciled humanity of Christians can be the instrument (perhaps the sacrament) of this action of the Lord who wishes to free his people from all that makes them a non-people, with its burden of injustice and of sin which begets death. We *need to look at this people and not at ourselves*, to allow ourselves to be challenged and inconvenienced. This will surely produce something new, original and desired by the Lord.

Before reconciliation and awareness, there is a passage that the Church of Rome must undergo in order to be faithful to this call of hers: and that is to be reconciled and to reclaim a truly pastoral gaze — attentive, caring, benevolent, engaged — both toward herself and her history, and toward the people to whom she is sent.

I would like to invite you to dedicate some time to this: to ensure that already this coming year may be a sort of preparation of the backpack (or the luggage) to begin a journey of several years that will enable us to reach the new land which the pillar of cloud and fire will point out to us. This means new conditions of life and of pastoral action, more responsive to the mission and to the needs of the Roman people of these times of ours; more creative and more liberating for the

presbyters too, and for those who cooperate more directly in the mission and the edification of the Christian community. Not to be afraid of what we are and of the gift that we have, but to make it bear fruit. The journey may be long: the people of Israel spent 40 years. Do not be discouraged; go forth!

The Lord calls us to “go and bear fruit” (cf. Jn 15:16). In plants, the fruit is that part produced and offered for the life of other living beings. Do not be afraid to bear fruit, to let yourselves be “consumed” by the reality that you will encounter, even if this “willingness to be consumed” very closely resembles disappearing, dying. Perhaps some traditional initiatives will have to be reformed or perhaps even discontinued: we can do so only by knowing where we are going, why and with Whom.

I invite you to also interpret in this way some of the difficulties and afflictions that you have identified in your communities: as realities that perhaps are no longer good to eat, they can no longer be offered for anyone’s hunger. Which in no way means that we can no longer produce anything, but rather, that we must graft new shoots: grafts that will bear new fruit. Take courage and go forth. The time is ours. Forward.