



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY'S COLLEGE

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 24 October 2024*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, Your Eminence, good morning!

I greet Fr Vincenzo Cosatti and all of you. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the entrustment of the ministry of Confessions in Saint Peter's Basilica to the Friars Minor Conventual (cf. Clement XIV, *Motu proprio Miserator Dominus*, 10 August 1774). Clement XIV did this — perhaps one of the good things he did. But, poor man, the other things he did were inspired by that friar of yours, Bontempi, whom I believe is still in hell [laughter], but I am not sure. When Clement XIV died, Bontempi sought refuge in the Spanish Embassy because he was afraid. A few months later, when there was peace, he went to the General and said: "Father General, I have brought three Bulls here. [In exchange I ask] first, that I may have money — a Franciscan! —; second, that I may live outside the community; and third, that I may travel where I please". And the General, a wise Conventual, took the Bulls: "But, dear man, one is missing". "Which one, Father?". "The one that will guarantee the salvation of your soul!". This is historic, because he had deceived Pope Ganganelli with all these things. Bontempi was very cunning!

Every day, more than 40,000 people visit Saint Peter's Basilica — every day! Many come from far away and face journeys, expenses and long queues to be able to get there. Others come for tourism, the majority. But among them, many come to pray at the tomb of the First Apostle to confirm their faith and their communion with the Church, to entrust their cherished intentions to the Lord, or to fulfil vows they made. Others, including people of different faiths, enter it as "tourists", attracted by the beauty, history and charm of art. But there is one great conscious or unconscious quest shared by all: the search for God, Beauty and eternal Goodness, whose desire lives and

beats in the heart of every man and woman living in this world. The desire for God.

And your presence in this context is important. For the faithful and pilgrims, because it enables them to encounter the Lord of mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Dear friends, forgive everything, everything, everything. Do it always: forgive everything! We are here to forgive, there will be others to quarrel! And for everyone else, as a witness to them that the Church welcomes them first of all as a community of the saved, of forgiven people, who believe, hope and love in the light and with the strength of God's tenderness. Let us pause for a moment to reflect on the ministry you carry out, emphasizing three particular aspects: *humility*, *listening* and *mercy*.

First: humility. The Apostle Peter, the forgiven disciple who went so far as to shed his blood in martyrdom after having wept humbly for his own sins, is the one who teaches us this (*Lk* 22:56-62). He reminds us that every Apostle — and every Penitentiary — has the treasure of grace that is dispensed in an earthen vessel, “to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (*2 Cor* 4:7). Therefore, dear brothers, in order to be good confessors, let us first “allow ourselves to be penitents in search of his mercy” (Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, 17), spreading the perfume of a humble prayer, that implores and begs for mercy, beneath the Vatican Basilica's imposing vaults.

Second: listening, to everyone and especially to the young and small. It is the witness of Peter the shepherd, who walks among his flock and who grows in listening to the Spirit through the voice of his brethren (*Acts* 10:34-48). Indeed, listening is not merely hearing what people say, but first of all welcoming their words as a gift of God for their conversion, in docility, like clay in the potter's hands (cf. *Is* 64:8). It will be good for us, in this regard, never to forget that, by “truly listening to a brother or sister in the sacramental dialogue, we listen to Jesus himself, poor and humble... we become hearers of the Word” (*Address to participants in the Course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary*, 9 March 2018). Only in this way can we hope to offer them the greatest service: that of putting them “in contact with Jesus” (ibid). Listening, not so much asking questions; do not be a psychiatrist, please: listen, always listen, meekly. And when you see that a penitent is struggling because he or she is ashamed, say, “I understand”; I didn't understand anything, but I understand; God understands and that is what's important. A great Cardinal penitentiary taught me this: “I understand”, the Lord has understood. But please do not be a psychiatrist: the less you speak, the better. Listen, console and forgive. You are there to forgive!

Finally, the third: mercy. As dispensers of God's forgiveness, it is important to be “men of mercy”, cheerful men, generous, ready to understand and to comfort in words and in attitudes. Here too Peter is an example to us, with his discourses full of forgiveness (cf. *Acts* 3:12-20). The confessor — an earthen vessel, as we have said — has only one medicine to pour over the wounds of his brethren: God's mercy. These three aspects of God: closeness, mercy and compassion. The confessor must be close, merciful and compassionate. When a confessor starts to ask... no, you are acting like a psychiatrist, stop, please. Saint Leopold Mandić, teaches us this. He liked to say:

“Why should we further humiliate souls who come to prostrate themselves at our feet? Are they not already humiliated enough? Did Jesus humiliate the publican, the adulteress, the Magdalene?” and he added, “And if the Lord were to reproach me for being too lenient, I could reply, ‘Blessed Father, you set a bad example for me, dying on the cross for our souls, moved by your divine charity’” (cf. Lorenzo da Fara, Leopold Mandić. *L’umanità la santità*, Velar, 1989). May the Lord give us the grace to be able to repeat the same words!

I have told the story of that Capuchin who was a confessor in Buenos Aires, several times before — I don’t know if I have told you this — I created him a Cardinal, not this time, last time. He is 96 years old and continues to confess; I used to go to him, he forgives everything! He once came to tell me that he was afraid he had forgiven too much. “And what will you do?”, I asked him. “I will go before the Lord: Lord, will you forgive me? I am sorry, I have forgiven too much! But, mind, it was you who gave me the bad example!”. Always forgive, everything and without asking too much. And if I do not understand? God understands, keep going! Let them feel mercy.

Dear brothers, thank you for your service, for your dedication and patience, for your fidelity! My confessor died a few months ago. I now go to confession with you, at Saint Peter’s. You do well! Thank you for being ministers of the sacramental presence of God-Love, in the heart of the Church. Continue your ministry this way: in humility — I am worse than you; in listening, and not so much in asking questions; and in mercy.

Please, do not forget to pray for me. And every time I come to you, forgive me, of course.

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