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Mass for the 200th anniversary of the Vatican Gendarmerie: the poor pay the price of fraud and corruption

The Vatican Gendarmes Corps celebrates two hundred years since its institution. To mark the occasion, this morning Pope Francis celebrated Mass in the Vatican basilica, thanking the security force for their work. “I thank you for this two centuries-long service, and I hope for all of you that the society of Vatican City State, the Holy See, from the first to the last, recognise your service, a service that protects, a service that seeks not only to ensure that things are done in the correct way, but also to do them with love, with tenderness, and even risking one’s own life”.

The Holy Father commented in his homily on the day’s Bible readings, from the prophet Amos, St. Paul’s Letter to Timothy and the Gospel of St. Luke that describes three types of people – the exploiter, the fraudster and the faithful man – and mentioned that the Vatican Gendarmerie must also combat fraud and exploitation, and reject the temptations of those who would corrupt them. He also expressed his pride in those who defend their honour at all cost.

“The exploiter”, he said, referring to the first reading, “is a person interested in a maniacal way only in obtaining wealth, to the point of being irritated by and intolerant of the days of liturgical rest because they break the frenetic rhythm of trade. The costs are borne in particular by the poor and the destitute, reduced to slavery. ... Unfortunately, this is a type of human we encounter in every age, and there are many today too”.

“The fraudster is a man who has no faith”, he continued. “The Gospel tells us about him in the parable of the dishonest manager. How did this manager arrive at the point of defrauding and stealing from his master? From one day to the next? No. Bit by bit. Perhaps one day he gave a tip here, a bribe there, and gradually, step by step he arrived at the point of corruption. In the parable the master praises the manager for his shrewdness. But this is an entirely worldly and sinful shrewdness, which does great harm. There exists, instead, a Christian shrewdness, of doing this in an astute way, but not in a worldly spirit: doing things honestly. And this is good. It is what Jesus says when He invites us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves: putting these two dimensions together is a grace of the Holy Spirit, a grace we must ask. Today too there are many of these corrupt fraudsters. ... I am struck by how corruption is widespread everywhere”.

The third figure is the faithful man. "The profile of the faithful man can be found in the second letter. It is he who follows Jesus, Who gave Himself to redeem all, Who gave His witness according to the will of the Father. The faithful man is a man of prayer, in the dual sense that he prays for others and trusts in the pray of others for him, 'that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way'. The faithful man can walk with his head held high".

"The Word of God leads us to a final choice: 'No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money'. The fraudster loves fraud and hates honesty. The fraudster loves bribes, shady agreements. ... And the worst thing of all is that he believes he is honest. The fraudster loves money, loves wealth: wealth is an idol. It matters not to him, as the prophet says, if he harms the poor. They are those with the great industries built on slave labour. And nowadays slave labour is a style of management", Francis emphasised.

"You celebrate your mission today", he concluded, addressing the Gendarmes. "Your mission is to defend and promote honesty, and frequently you are poorly rewarded. I thank you for your vocation; I thank you for the work you do".
