SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO
HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 190215e

Friday 15.02.2019

Holy Mass for the opening of the Meeting “Free from Fear”, presided at by the Holy Father at the Fraterna Domus of Sacrofano

Holy Mass for the opening of the Meeting “Free from Fear”, presided at by the Holy Father at the Fraterna Domus of Sacrofano

This afternoon, after leaving Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis transferred to the *Fraterna Domus* of Sacrofano, Rome, to celebrate the Holy Mass for the opening of the Meeting “Free from fear”, promoted and organized by the *Migrantes* Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference, by Italian Caritas and the Astalli Centre from 15 to 17 February 2019.

Upon arrival the Holy Father was received by the bishops present and the organizers. Then, at 16.00, in the Church of the *Fraterna Domus*, he presided at the Eucharistic Concelebration. During the Holy Mass, after the greeting from the general secretary of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Msgr. Stefano Russo, and the proclamation of the Gospel, the Pope pronounced his homily.

Before the final blessing, the president of the *Migrantes* Foundation, H.E. Msgr. Guerino Di Tora, addressed a greeting to the Holy Father. He then gave the Pope a canvas depicting Jesus who grasps the fearful Peter sinking in the waters, with the text *Ego sum nolite timere*, and a brochure illustrating the exhibition “Exodus” by Safet Zec, promoted and supported by the *Migrantes* Foundation, Italian Caritas and Caritas Rome, which will be inaugurated this coming 20 February in the Church of San Francesco Saverio del Caravita in Rome.

Then the Pope, after imparting the final blessing, addressed some words of thanks and encouragement to all the faithful present.

At the end, before leaving the *Fraterna Domus*, the Holy Father greeted the women religious who direct the Centre. He then returned by car to the Vatican.

The following is the homily that Pope Francis pronounced during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

The wealth of the readings chosen for this Eucharistic celebration can be summarized in a single phrase: “Do not be afraid”.

The passage from the Book of Exodus presented us the Israelites near the Red Sea, terrorized by the fact that the Pharaoh’s army has followed them and is about to catch up with them. Many think: it would have been better to stay in Egypt and live as slaves rather than die in the desert. But Moses invites the people not to be afraid, as the Lord is with them: “Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today” (*Ex* 14: 13). The long journey through the desert, necessary to reach the promised land, begins with this first great trial. Israel is called to look beyond the adversities of the moment, to overcome fear and to again place full trust in the salvific and mysterious action of the Lord.

In the page of the Gospel of Matthew (14: 22-33), the disciples are troubled and cry out in fear at the sight of the Master Who walks on water, thinking He is a ghost. On the boat, moved by a strong wind, they are unable to recognise Jesus; but He reassures them, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (v. 27). Peter, with a mixture of diffidence and enthusiasm, asks Jesus for proof: “Tell me to come to you on the water” v. 28). Jesus calls to him. Peter takes a few steps, but then the violence of the wind frightens him again and he starts to sink. While He grasps him to save him, the Master rebukes him: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31).

Through these biblical episodes, the Lord speaks to us and asks us to let Him from us from our fears. “*Free from fear*” is indeed the theme chosen this meeting of yours. “Free from fear”. Fear is the origin of slavery: the Israelites preferred to become slaves out of fear. It is also the origin of every dictatorship, because the violence of dictators grows on the fear of the people.

Faced with the wickedness and ugliness of our time, we too, like the people of Israel, are tempted to abandon our dream of freedom. We feel legitimate fear when faced with situations that seem to offer us no way out. And the human words of a leader or prophet are not enough to reassure us when we fail to feel the presence of God and we are not able to abandon ourselves to His providence. Thus, we close up in ourselves, in our fragile human securities, in the circle of loved ones, in our reassuring routine. And in the end we renounce the journey to the promised Land to return to the slavery of Egypt.

This turning inwards towards ourselves, a sign of defeat, increases our fear of “others”, the unknown, the marginalized, outsiders – who are moreover the privileged of the Lord, as we read in Matthew 25. And this we see in particular today, faced with the arrival of migrants and refugees who knock on our door in search of protection, security and a better future. It is true, the fear is legitimate, also because the preparation for this encounter is lacking. I said so last year, on the occasion of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: “It is not easy to enter into another culture, to put oneself in the shoes of people so different from us, to understand their thoughts and experiences. As a result we often refuse to encounter the other and raise barriers to defend ourselves”. To renounce an encounter is not human.

We are called instead to overcome fear so as to open up to encounter. And to do this, rational justifications and statistical calculations are not enough. Moses said to the people in front of the Red Sea, with a fierce enemy at their heels: “Do not be afraid,”, because the Lord does not abandon His people; rather, He acts mysteriously in history to realize His plan of salvation. Moses speaks so simply because he trusts in God.

The encounter with the other, then, is also an encounter with Christ. He Himself said so. It is He Who knocks on our door, hungry, thirsty, an outsider, naked, sick and imprisoned, asking to be met and assisted. And if we still had any doubt, here is His clear word: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (*Mt* 25: 40).

In this sense the Master's encouragement of His disciples can also be understood: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (*Mt* 14: 27). It is truly Him, even though our eyes find it hard to recognize Him: with His clothing in rags, His feet dirty, His face disfigured, His body wounded, unable to speak our language… We too, like Peter, may be tempted to put Jesus to the test and to ask Him for a sign. And perhaps, after a hesitant step towards Him, we may again be victims of our fears. But the Lord does not abandon us! Even if we are men and women "of little faith", Christ continues to extend His hand to save us and to enable the encounter with Him, an encounter that saves us and restores to us the joy of being His disciples.

If this is a valid key to the reading of our story today, then we should begin to thank those who give us the opportunity for this encounter, or rather, the "others" who knock on our doors, offering us the possibility of overcoming our fears to encounter, welcome and assist Jesus in person.

And those who have had the strength to let themselves be freed from fear, those who have experienced the joy of this encounter, are called today to proclaim it from the rooftops, openly, to help others do likewise, predisposing themselves to the encounter with Christ and His salvation.

Brothers and sisters, it is a grace that carries with it a mission, the fruit of complete entrustment to the Lord, which is for us the only real certainty. Therefore, as individuals and as a community, we are called to make ours the prayer of the redeemed population: "The Lord is my strength and my defence; He has become my salvation" (*Ex* 15: 2).