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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Iraq (5 to 8 March 2021) - Holy Mass in “Franso Hariri” Stadium in Erbil

Holy Mass in "Franso Hariri" Stadium in Erbil

Homily of the Holy Father

Greeting of the Holy Father

After lunch in Saint Peter’s Patriarchal Seminary, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to “Franso Hariri” Stadium in Erbil for the celebration of Holy Mass.

After touring among the faithful several times in the popemobile, at 16.30 local time (14.30 in Rome) the Pope presided at the Eucharistic celebration on the Second Sunday of Lent in the presence of 10,000 faithful. After the proclamation of the Gospel he delivered his homily.

At the end of the Holy Mass, the Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda, C.Ss.R., addressed greetings and thanks to the Holy Father. Before the final blessing, Pope Francis addressed some words of greeting and thanks to the faithful and pilgrims present. He then met with Mr. Abdullah Kurdi, father of the child Alan, shipwrecked with his brother and mother on the Turkish coast in September 2015, in the attempt to reach Europe.

After taking leave of the Archbishop of Erbil, the president and the prime minister of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Holy Father left the “Franso Hariri” Stadium and transferred by car to Erbil Airport where he boarded an Iraqi Airways aircraft bound for Baghdad Airport. He then returned by car to the apostolic nunciature.

The following is the homily and final greeting pronounced by Pope Francis during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

Saint Paul has told us that “Christ is the power and wisdom of God” (*1 Cor* 1:22-25). Jesus revealed that power and wisdom above all by offering forgiveness and showing mercy. He chose to do so not by displays of strength or by speaking to us from on high, in lengthy and learned discourses. He did so by giving his life on the cross. He revealed his wisdom and power by showing us, to the very end, the faithfulness of the Father’s love; the faithfulness of the God of the covenant, who brought his people forth from slavery and led them on a journey of freedom (cf. *Ex* 20:1-2).

How easy it is to fall into the trap of thinking that we have to show others that we are powerful or wise, into the trap of fashioning false images of God that can give us security (cf. *Ex* 20:4-5). Yet the truth is that all of us need the power and wisdom of God revealed by Jesus on the cross. On Calvary, he offered to the Father the wounds by which alone we are healed (cf. *1 Pet* 2:24). Here in Iraq, how many of your brothers and sisters, friends and fellow citizens bear the wounds of war and violence, wounds both visible and invisible! The temptation is to react to these and other painful experiences with human power, human wisdom. Instead, Jesus shows us the way of God, the path that he took, the path on which he calls us to follow him.

In the Gospel reading we have just heard (*Jn* 2:13-25), we see how Jesus drove out from the Temple in Jerusalem the moneychangers and all the buyers and sellers. Why did Jesus do something this forceful and provocative? He did it because the Father sent him to cleanse the temple: not only the Temple of stone, but above all the temple of our heart. Jesus could not tolerate his Father’s house becoming a marketplace (cf. *Jn* 2:16); neither does he want our hearts to be places of turmoil, disorder and confusion. Our heart must be cleansed, put in order and purified. Of what? Of the falsehoods that stain it, from hypocritical duplicity. All of us have these. They are diseases that harm the heart, soil our lives and make them insincere. We need to be cleansed of the deceptive securities that would barter our faith in God with passing things, with temporary advantages. We need the baneful temptations of power and money to be swept from our hearts and from the Church. To cleanse our hearts, we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering. How do we purify our hearts? By our own efforts, we cannot; we need Jesus. He has the power to conquer our evils, to heal our diseases, to rebuild the temple of our heart.

To show this, and as a sign of his authority, Jesus goes on to say: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). Jesus Christ, he alone, can cleanse us of the works of evil. Jesus, who died and rose! Jesus, the Lord! Dear brothers and sisters, God does not let us die in our sins. Even when we turn our backs on him, he never leaves us to our own devices. He seeks us out, runs after us, to call us to repentance and to cleanse us of our sins. “As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (*Ezek* 33:11). The Lord wants us to be saved and to become living temples of his love, in fraternity, in service, in mercy.

Jesus not only cleanses us of our sins, but gives us a share in his own power and wisdom. He liberates us from the narrow and divisive notions of family, faith and community that divide, oppose and exclude, so that we can build a Church and a society open to everyone and concerned for our brothers and sisters in greatest need. At the same time, he strengthens us to resist the temptation to seek revenge, which only plunges us into a spiral of endless retaliation. In the power of the Holy Spirit, he sends us forth, not as proselytizers, but as missionary disciples, men and women called to testify to the life-changing power of the Gospel. The risen Lord makes us instruments of God’s mercy and peace, patient and courageous artisans of a new social order. In this way, by the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the prophetic words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians are fulfilled: “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s wisdom is stronger than human strength” (*1 Cor* 1:25). Christian communities made up of simple and lowly people become a sign of the coming of his kingdom, a kingdom of love, justice and peace.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (*Jn* 2:19). Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body, and about the Church as well. The Lord promises us that, by the power of the resurrection, he can raise us, and our communities, from the ruins left by injustice, division and hatred. That is the promise we celebrate in this Eucharist. With the eyes of faith, we recognize the presence of the crucified and risen Lord in our midst. And

we learn to embrace his liberating wisdom, to rest in his wounds, and to find healing and strength to serve the coming of his kingdom in our world. By his wounds, we have been healed (cf. *1 Pet 2:24*). In those wounds, dear brothers and sisters, we find the balm of his merciful love. For he, like the Good Samaritan of humanity, wants to anoint every hurt, to heal every painful memory and to inspire a future of peace and fraternity in this land.

The Church in Iraq, by God's grace, is already doing much to proclaim this wonderful wisdom of the cross by spreading Christ's mercy and forgiveness, particularly towards those in greatest need. Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and suffering. That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you and to confirm you in your faith and witness. Today, I can see at first hand that the Church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people.

Dear brothers and sisters, I commend you, your families and your communities, to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, who was united to her Son in his passion and death, and who shared in the joy of his resurrection. May she intercede for us and lead us to *Christ, the power and wisdom of God*.
