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Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to Matera for the conclusion of the 27th National Eucharistic Congress

This morning, due to adverse weather conditions, the Holy Father Francis left Santa Marta at 6.30 and transferred to Rome-Ciampino Airport where, at 7.00, he departed for his pastoral visit to Matera at the conclusion of the 27th National Eucharistic Congress.

The Pope arrived in private, at Gioia del Colle, and transferred by car to Matera. Upon reaching the “Raffaele Duni” School Athletics Field, after a change of vehicle, the Holy Father proceeded to the *XXI Settembre* Municipal Stadium where he was received by Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, metropolitan archbishop of Bologna, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference; Archbishop Antonio Giuseppe Caiazza of Matera-Irsina; the Honorable Vito Bardi, president of the Basilicata Region; Dr. Sante Copponi, prefect of Matera; Dr. Domenico Bennardi, mayor of Matera; and Dr. Piero Marrese, president of the province of Matera.

At 9.00, after several tours by popemobile among the twelve thousand faithful present in the Municipal Stadium, the Holy Father presided over Holy Mass.

During the Eucharistic Celebration, after the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, the Pope delivered his homily.

After the words of thanks of the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, His Eminence Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, metropolitan archbishop of Bologna, the Pope gave a chalice for the diocese of Matera-Irsina to Archbishop Antonio Giuseppe Caiazza.

Pope Francis then led the recitation of the Angelus prayer with the faithful and pilgrims present.

At the end of the Eucharistic Celebration, before leaving the Municipal Stadium, the Holy Father paused in silent prayer before the icon of the Virgin Mary.

The Pope then proceeded by car to the *Mensa della Fraternità* soup kitchen dedicated to “Don Giovanni Mele”, where he met with and greeted the staff and blessed the new structure.

After concluding the visit to the *Mensa della Fraternità*, the Holy Father took leave of the authorities who had received him on arrival and transferred by car to Gioia del Colle where, at 11.55, he departed and returned to the Vatican.

The following is the homily delivered by the Holy Father during the course of the Holy Mass for the conclusion of the 27th National Eucharistic Congress, and the Pope's words at the recitation of the Angelus:

Homily of the Holy Father

The Lord gathers us around his table, making himself bread for us. "The bread of the feast on the table of the sons [...] creates sharing, strengthens bonds, has the flavour of communion" (*Hymn XVII, National Eucharistic Congress, Matera 2022*). And yet, the Gospel we have just listened to tells us that bread is not always shared on the world table: this is true; the fragrance of communion does not always emanate; it is not always broken in justice.

It is good for us to pause before the dramatic scene described by Jesus in this parable we have listened to: on one side a rich man dressed in purple and byssus, who flaunts his opulence and banquets lavishly; on the other, a poor man covered in sores, who lies at the door hoping that some crumbs will fall from the table to assuage his hunger. And faced with this contradiction – which we see every day – before this contradiction, we wonder: to what does the sacrament of the Eucharist, source and apex of Christian life, invite us?

Firstly, the Eucharist reminds us of *God's primacy*. The rich man in the parable is not open to the relationship with God: he thinks only of his own wellbeing, of satisfying his needs, of enjoying life. And in so doing he has lost his name. The Gospel does not say what he is called: he is named with the adjective "rich", whereas it gives the poor man's name: Lazarus. Riches bring you to this, they even strip you of your name. Self-satisfied, inebriated with money, dulled by the pride of vanity, in his life there is no place for God because he worships only himself. It is not by chance that his name is not given: they call him "rich", they define him only with an adjective because by now he has lost his name, he has lost his identity that is given to him only by the goods he possesses. How sad this situation is, also today, when we confuse what we are with what we have, when we judge people by the wealth they have, the roles they hold, or the brand of clothing they wear. It is the *religion of having and appearing*, which often dominates the scene in this world, but which in the end leaves us empty-handed, always. Indeed, this rich man in the Gospel is not even left with a name. He is no longer anyone. On the contrary, the poor man has a name, Lazarus, which means "God helps". Despite his condition of poverty and marginalization, he is able to keep his dignity intact because he lives in a relationship with God. In his very name there is something of God, and God is the unshakeable hope of his life.

Here then is the ongoing challenge that the Eucharist offers to our lives: to worship God and not ourselves. To put him at the centre, and not the vanity of self. To remind ourselves that only the Lord is God and everything else is a gift of his love. Because if we worship ourselves, we die suffocated by our small selves; if we worship the riches of this world, they take possession of us and make us slaves; if we worship the god of appearance and inebriate ourselves in wastefulness, sooner or later life itself will ask us for the bill. Life always asks us for the bill. When, on the other hand, we adore the Lord Jesus present in the Eucharist, we also receive a new outlook on our lives: I am not the things I possess or the successes I manage to achieve; the value of my life does not depend on how much I can show off, nor does it diminish when I falter and fail. I am a beloved child, each one of us is a beloved child; I am blessed by God; He wanted to clothe me with beauty and He wants me free, He wants me free from all slavery. Let us remember this: he who worships God does not become a slave to anyone: he is free. Let us rediscover the prayer of adoration, a prayer that is often forgotten. Worship, the prayer of adoration, let us rediscover it: it frees us and restores us to our dignity as sons and daughters, not slaves.

Besides God's primacy, the Eucharist calls us to *love our brothers and sisters*. This Bread is the quintessential Sacrament of love. It is Christ who offers himself and breaks himself for us, and asks us to do likewise, so that our life may be ground wheat and become bread to feed the hungry. The rich man of the Gospel fails in this task:

he lives in opulence and banquets abundantly without even being aware of the silent cry of poor Lazarus, who lies exhausted at his door. Only at the end of life, when the Lord turns the tables, does he finally notice Lazarus, but Abraham tells him, "Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed" (Lk 16:26). But you fixed it: yourself. This is us, when in selfishness we create abysses. It was the rich man who dug an abyss between himself and Lazarus during earthly life and now, in eternal life, that abyss remains. Because our eternal future depends on this present life: if we now dig an abyss with our brothers and sisters now, we "dig our own grave" for later; if we raise walls against our brothers and sisters now, we remain imprisoned in solitude and death afterwards too.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is painful to see that this parable is still the story of our times: injustices, disparities, the earth's resources distributed unequally, the abuses perpetrated by the powerful against the weak, indifference to the cry of the poor, the abyss that we dig every day, generating marginalization – all these things cannot leave us indifferent. And so today, together, let us acknowledge that the Eucharist is the prophecy of a new world, it is the presence of Jesus who asks us to work to make an effective conversion take place: conversion from indifference to compassion, conversion from waste to sharing, conversion from selfishness to love, conversion from individualism to fraternity.

Brothers and sisters, let us dream. Let us dream of such a Church: a Eucharistic Church. Made up of women and men who offer themselves as bread for all those who are fed loneliness and poverty, for those who hunger for tenderness and compassion, for those whose lives are crumbling because the good leaven of hope has been lacking. A Church that kneels before the Eucharist and worships with awe the Lord present in the bread; but which also knows how to bend with compassion and tenderness before the wounds of those who suffer, lifting up the poor, wiping away the tears of those who suffer, making itself the bread of hope and joy for all. Because there is no true Eucharistic worship without compassion for the many "Lazaruses" who even today walk beside us. There are so many of them!

Brothers, sisters, from this city of Matera, "city of bread", I would like to say to you: let us return to Jesus, let us return to the Eucharist. Let us return to the taste of bread, because while we hunger for love and hope, or are broken by the hardships and sufferings of life, Jesus makes himself the nourishment that feeds and heals us. Let us return to the flavour of bread, because while injustice and discrimination against the poor continue to take place in the world, Jesus gives us the Bread of Sharing and sends us out daily as apostles of fraternity, apostles of justice, apostles of peace. Let us return to the taste of bread to be a Eucharistic Church, which puts Jesus at the centre and becomes the bread of tenderness, the bread of mercy for all. Let us return to the taste of bread to remember that while this earthly existence of ours is being consumed, the Eucharist anticipates the promise of the resurrection and guides us towards the new life that conquers death.

Let us think seriously today about the rich man and Lazarus. It happens every day, this. And very often also – shame on us – it happens in us, this battle between us, in the community. And when hope is extinguished and we feel within us the loneliness of the heart, inner weariness, the torment of sin, the fear of failure, let us again return to the taste of bread. We are all sinners: each one of us bears his or her own sins. But, sinners, let us return to the taste of the Eucharist, the taste of bread. Let us return to Jesus, let us worship Jesus, let us welcome Jesus. Because he is the only one who defeats death and always renews our life.

Angelus

At the end of this celebration, I would like to thank all of you who have taken part, representing the holy People of God in Italy. And I am grateful to Cardinal Zuppi, who acted as its spokesperson. I congratulate the diocesan community of Matera-Irsina for the organizational and welcoming effort, and I thank everyone who collaborated in this Eucharistic Congress.

Now, before concluding, let us turn to the Virgin Mary, Eucharistic Woman. We entrust to her the journey of the Church in Italy, so that in every community the fragrance of Christ the living Bread descended from Heaven may be felt. Today I would dare to ask for Italy: more births, more children. And we invoke her maternal intercession

for the world's most urgent needs.

I think, in particular, of Myanmar. For more than two years that noble country has been martyred by serious armed clashes and violence, which have caused many victims and displaced persons. This week I heard the cry of grief at the death of children in a bombed school. We see that in today's world there is a trend for bombing schools. May the cry of these little ones not go unheard! These tragedies must not happen!

Mary, Queen of Peace, comfort the martyred Ukrainian people and obtain from the heads of Nations the strength of will immediately to find effective initiatives to bring the war to an end.

I join in the appeal of the bishops of Cameroon for the liberation of some people kidnapped in the diocese of Mamfe, including five priests and a religious sister. I pray for them and for the populations of the ecclesiastical province of Bamenda: may the Lord give peace to hearts and to the social life of that dear country.

Today, this Sunday, the Church celebrates World Day of Migrants and Refugees, on the theme: "Building the future with migrants and refugees". Let us renew our commitment to building the future in accordance with God's plan: a future in which every person may find his or her place and be respected; in which migrants, refugees, displaced persons and the victims of human trafficking may live in peace and with dignity. So that the Kingdom of God is realized with them, without exclusion. It is also thanks to those brothers and sisters that communities can grow on a social, economic, cultural and spiritual level; and the sharing of diverse traditions enriches the People of God. Let us all work together to build a more inclusive and fraternal future! Migrants must be welcomed, accompanied, supported and integrated.
