



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 5 November 2014

[Multimedia]

Holy Mother Church as hierarchy

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

We have listened to what the Apostle Paul says to Bishop Tito. How many virtues do we bishops have? We heard everything, did we not? It's not easy, it's not easy, because we are sinners. But we entrust ourselves to your prayers, so that we may at least come closer to these things that the Apostle Paul advises all bishops. Do you agree? Will you pray for us?

We have already had the occasion to stress, in preceding catecheses, how the Holy Spirit is always abundantly filling the Church with his gifts. Now, by the power and grace of His Spirit, Christ does not fail to set up ministries in order to build up Christian communities as his Body. Among these ministries, one can distinguish that of the episcopate. In the bishop, assisted by priests and deacons, it is Christ himself who makes himself present and who continues to care for his Church, by ensuring his protection and his guidance.

1. In the presence and in the ministry of the bishops, of the priests and deacons, we can recognize the true face of the Church: it is the Hierarchical Holy Mother Church. And truly, through these brothers chosen by the Lord and consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Church exercises her motherhood: she gives birth to us in Baptism as Christians, giving us a new birth in Christ; she watches over our growth in the faith; she accompanies us into the arms of the Father, to receive his forgiveness; she prepares the Eucharistic table for us, where she nourishes us with the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus; she invokes upon us the blessing of God and the power of his Spirit, sustaining us throughout the course of our life and enveloping us with her

tenderness and warmth, especially in those most delicate moments of trial, of suffering and of death.

2. This motherhood of the Church is expressed in particular in the person of the bishop and in his ministry. In fact, as Jesus chose the Apostles and sent them out to proclaim the Gospel and to tend his flock, so bishops, his successors, are set at the head of Christian communities, as guarantors of the faith and as living signs of the presence of the Lord among them. We understand, then, that this is not a position of prestige, an honorary title. The episcopate is not an honour, it's a service. This is how Jesus wanted it. There should be no place in the Church for a worldly mentality. The worldly mentality says: "This man took the ecclesiastical career path, he became a bishop". No, no, in the Church there must be no place for this mindset. The episcopate is a service, not an honour to boast about. Being a bishop means keeping before one's eyes the example of Jesus who, as the Good Shepherd, came not to be served, but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45) and to give his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:11). Holy bishops — and there are many in the history of the Church, many holy bishops — show us that this ministry is not sought, is not requested, is not bought, but is accepted in obedience, not in order to elevate oneself, but to lower oneself, as Jesus did who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). It is sad when one sees a man who seeks this office and who does so much just to get there; and when he gets there, he does not serve, he struts around, he lives only for his own vanity.

3. There is another precious element that deserves to be pointed out. When Jesus chose and called the Apostles, He did not think of them as separate from one another, each one on his own, but together, because they were to stay with Him, united, like a single family. Furthermore, bishops also constitute one single College, gathered around the Pope, who is the guardian and guarantor of this profound communion that was so close to Jesus' heart and to his Apostles' too. How beautiful it is, then, when bishops, with the Pope, express this collegiality and always seek to be better servants to the faithful, better servants in the Church! We recently experienced it in the Assembly of the Synod on the Family. Just think of all the bishops spread around the world who, despite living in widely different places, cultures, sensibilities and traditions — one bishop said to me the other day that it takes him more than 30 hours by plane to come to Rome — they each feel part of the other and they become an expression of the intimate bond, in Christ, between their communities. And in the common prayer of the Church, all bishops place themselves together in listening to the Lord and to the Holy Spirit, paying profound attention to man and to the signs of the times (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4).

Dear friends, all this makes us understand that Christian communities recognize in the bishop a great gift, and are called to nourish a sincere and profound communion with him, beginning with the priests and deacons. No Church is healthy if the faithful, the deacons and the priests are not united to the bishop. This Church, that is not united to the bishop, is a sick Church. Jesus wanted this union of all the faithful with the bishop, including the deacons and priests. And this they do

aware that it is precisely in the bishop that the bond is made visible with each Church, with the Apostles and with all other communities, united to their bishops and the Pope in the one Church of the Lord Jesus, that is our Hierarchical Holy Mother Church. Thank you.

Greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including the various groups from England, Malta, Denmark, Japan and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all!

A warm welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims! In this audience we connected via the maxi screen with our sick brothers and sisters because, as there was a chance of rain, they are in the Paul VI Hall. I greet especially Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia of Turin as well as Mayor Piero Fassino. I am delighted to announce that, God willing, on 21 June I will make a pilgrimage to Turin to venerate the Holy Shroud and to honour St John Bosco, on the occasion of the bicentenary of his birth.

Lastly, I turn my thoughts to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Yesterday we celebrated the memory of St Charles Borromeo, the fearless Pastor of Milan. May his spiritual vigour stimulate you, dear *young people*, to take the faith seriously in your lives; may his faith in Christ the Saviour sustain you, dear *sick people*, in moments of great difficulty; and may his apostolic dedication remind you, dear *newlyweds*, of the importance of Christian education in your family home.