



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO CUBA, TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
(19-28 SEPTEMBER 2015)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Plaza de la Revolución, Havana
Sunday, 20 September 2015

[Multimedia]

Jesus asks his disciples an apparently indiscreet question: “What were you discussing along the way?” It is a question which he could also ask each of us today: “What do you talk about every day?” “What are your aspirations?” The Gospel tells us that the disciples “did not answer because on the way they had been arguing about who was the most important”. They were ashamed to tell Jesus what they were talking about. Like the disciples then, today we too can be caught up in these same arguments: who is the most important?

Jesus does not press the question. He does not force them to tell him what they were talking about on the way. But the question lingers, not only in the minds of the disciples, but also in their hearts.

Who is the most important? This is a life-long question to which, at different times, we must give an answer. We cannot escape the question; it is written on our hearts. I remember more than once, at family gatherings, children being asked: “Who do you love more, Mommy or Daddy”? It’s like asking them: “Who is the most important for you?” But is this only a game we play with children? The history of humanity has been marked by the answer we give to this question.

Jesus is not afraid of people's questions; he is not afraid of our humanity or the different things we are looking for. On the contrary, he knows the depths of the human heart, and, as a good teacher, he is always ready to encourage and support us. As usual, he takes up our searching, our aspirations, and he gives them a new horizon. As usual, he somehow finds an the answer which can pose a new challenge, setting aside the "right answers", the standard replies we are expected to give. As usual, Jesus sets before us the "logic" of love. A mindset, an approach to life, which is capable of being lived out by all, because it is meant for all.

Far from any kind of elitism, the horizon to which Jesus points us is not for those few privileged souls capable of attaining the heights of knowledge or different levels of spirituality. The horizon to which Jesus points us always has to do with daily life, also here on "our island", something which can season our daily lives with eternity.

Who is the most important? Jesus is straightforward in his reply: "Whoever wishes to be the first – the most important – among you must be the last of all, and the servant of all". Whoever wishes to be great must serve others, not be served by others.

This is the great paradox of Jesus. The disciples were arguing about who would have the highest place, who would be chosen for privileges – they were the disciples, those closest to Jesus, and they were arguing about that! –, who would be above the common law, the general norm, in order to stand out in the quest for superiority over others. Who would climb the ladder most quickly to take the jobs which carry certain benefits.

Jesus upsets their "logic", their mindset, simply by telling them that life is lived authentically in a concrete commitment to our neighbor. That is, by serving.

The call to serve involves something special, to which we must be attentive. Serving means caring for their vulnerability. Caring for the vulnerable of our families, our society, our people. Theirs are the suffering, fragile and downcast faces which Jesus tells us specifically to look at and which he asks us to love. With a love which takes shape in our actions and decisions. With a love which finds expression in whatever tasks we, as citizens, are called to perform. It is people of flesh and blood, people with individual lives and stories, and with all their frailty, that Jesus asks us to protect, to care for and to serve. Being a Christian entails promoting the dignity of our brothers and sisters, fighting for it, living for it. That is why Christians are constantly called to set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable.

There is a kind of "service" which serves others, yet we need to be careful not to be tempted by another kind of service, one which is "self-serving" with regard to others. There is a way to go about serving which is interested in only helping "my people", "our people". This service always leaves "your people" outside, and gives rise to a process of exclusion.

All of us are called by virtue of our Christian vocation to that service which truly serves, and to help one another not to be tempted by a “service” which is really “self-serving”. All of us are asked, indeed urged, by Jesus to care for one another out of love. Without looking to one side or the other to see what our neighbor is doing or not doing. Jesus says: Whoever would be first among you must be the last, and the servant of all”. That person will be the first. Jesus does not say: if your neighbor wants to be first, let him be the servant! We have to be careful to avoid judgmental looks and renew our belief in the transforming look to which Jesus invites us.

This caring for others out of love is not about being servile. Rather, it means putting the question of our brothers and sisters at the center. Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, “suffers” that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people.

God’s holy and faithful people in Cuba is a people with a taste for celebrations, for friendship, for beautiful things. It is a people which marches with songs of praise. It is a people which has its wounds, like every other people, yet knows how to stand up with open arms, to keep walking in hope, because it has a vocation of grandeur. These were the seeds sown by your forebears. Today I ask you to care for this vocation of yours, to care for these gifts which God has given you, but above all I invite you to care for and be at the service of the frailty of your brothers and sisters. Do not neglect them for plans which can be seductive, but are unconcerned about the face of the person beside you. We know, we are witnesses of the incomparable power of the resurrection, which “everywhere calls forth the seeds of a new world” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 276, 278).

Let us not forget the Good News we have heard today: the importance of a people, a nation, and the importance of individuals, which is always based on how they seek to serve their vulnerable brothers and sisters. Here we encounter one of the fruits of a true humanity.

Because, dear brothers and sisters: “whoever does not live to serve, does not ‘serve’ to live”.