



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILGRIMAGE FROM THE DIOCESE OF BRESCIA

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 22 June 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Brescia, good morning!

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to commemorate with you the Venerable Servant of God Paul VI. I greet you all with affection, starting with your pastor, Bishop Luciano Monari, to whom I am grateful for his kind words. I greet the priests, the men and women religious and the lay faithful. This is your pilgrimage in the Year of Faith, and it is lovely that you chose to make it on the 50th anniversary of the election of Paul vi, your great compatriot.

How many things I should like to say and to recall about this great Pontiff. In thinking of him I shall limit myself to three fundamental aspects to which he bore witness and taught us, letting his enthusiastic words illustrate them: love for Christ, love for the Church and love for man. These three words are fundamental attitudes, but they are also Paul vi's passionate words.

1. In difficult years Paul VI was able to bear witness to faith in Jesus Christ. His invocation: "We need you, O Christ!", rings out more clearly than ever. Yes, Jesus is more necessary than ever to people today, to the world today, because in the "wildernesses" of the secular city he speaks to us of God and reveals his face to us. Montini's total love for Christ shines through his life, and also in the choice of his name as pope which he explained with these words: Paul is the Apostle "who loved Christ supremely, who wanted to and did his utmost to take Christ's Gospel to all the peoples and who gave his life for love of Christ (*Homily*, 30 June 1963: aas 55 [1963], 619). Moreover it was this totality which he indicated to the Council in his Opening Discourse for the Second Session in St Paul Outside-the-Walls, as he pointed to the Basilica's great mosaic in which Pope Honorius III, a minuscule figure, appears, lying at the feet of the imposing figure of Christ. This is how the Assembly of the Council was: at the feet of Christ, to be his servants and servants of the Gospel (cf. *Discourse* 29 September 1963: aas 55 [1963], 846-847).

Deep love for Christ, not to possess him but to proclaim him. Let us remember Paul VI's passionate words in Manila [at the Mass in Quezon Circle]: "Christ: yes, I feel the need to proclaim him, I cannot keep silent.... He reveals the invisible God, he is the firstborn of all creation, the foundation of everything created. He is the Teacher of mankind, and its Redeemer.... He is the centre of history and of the world; he is the One who knows us and who loves us; he is the companion and the friend of our life. He is the man of sorrows and of hope. It is he who will come and who one day will be our judge and — we hope — the everlasting fullness of our existence, our happiness" (*Address*, 29 November 1970: ore, 10 December 1970, p. 3). These passionate words are important words. But I confide one thing to you: this discourse in Manila, and also the one in Nazareth, have given me spiritual strength, they have done me so much good in my life. And I return to this discourse again and again because it does me good to hear these words of Paul VI today. And us? Do we have the same love for Christ? Is he the centre of our life? The witness of our daily actions?

2. The second point: love for the Church, a passionate love, the love of a whole life, joyful and anguished, expressed from his very first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*. Paul VI experienced to the full the Church's travail after the Second Vatican Council: the lights, the hopes, the tensions. He loved the Church and expended himself for her, holding nothing back. In *Pensiero alla morte* he wrote: "I would like to embrace her, to greet her, to love her in every being of which she is made, in every bishop and priest who assists her and guides her, in every living soul who illustrates her". And in his *Testament* he addressed these words to the Church: "receive with my blessing and greeting my final act of love" (30 June 1965; ore, 24 August 1978, p. 2). This is the heart of a true pastor, an authentic Christian, a man capable of love! Paul VI saw very clearly that the Church is a mother who brings Christ and brings to Christ. He asked this question in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* — to my mind the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day — he asked this question: "after the Council and thanks to the Council, which was a time given her by God, at this turning-point of history, does the Church or does she not find herself better equipped to proclaim the Gospel and to put it into people's hearts with conviction, freedom of spirit and effectiveness?" (8 December 1975, n. 4). And he continued: "is [the Church] firmly established in the midst of the world and yet free and independent enough to call for the world's attention? Does she testify to solidarity with people and at the same time to the divine Absolute? Is she more ardent in contemplation and adoration and more zealous in missionary, charitable and liberating action? Is she ever more committed to the effort to search for the restoration of the complete unity of Christians, a unity that makes more effective the common witness, 'so that the world may believe'?" (*ibid.*, n. 76). These questions are also put to our Church today, to all of us. We are all responsible for the answers and must ask ourselves: are we really a Church united to Christ in order to go out and proclaim him to everyone, also and above all in what I call the "existential outskirts"? Or are we closed in on ourselves, in our own groups, in our own little churches? Or do we love the great Church, Mother Church, the Church that sends us out on mission and brings us out of ourselves?

3. The third element: love for people. This too is bound to Christ: it is God's own passion that spurs us to encounter people, to respect them, recognize them and serve them. At the last Session of the Second Vatican Council Paul VI gave a discourse which on rereading never fails to impress, particularly where he speaks of the Council's attention for people today. And he said this: ultimately "secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the Council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. The discovery of human needs... But call upon those, who call themselves modern humanists, and who have renounced the transcendent value of the highest realities give the Council credit for one quality and to recognize our own new type of humanism: we, too, in fact, we more than any others, honour mankind" (*Homily*, 7 December 1965: aas 58 [1966], 55-66). And with an overall look at the work of the Council he remarked: "all this rich teaching is channelled in one direction, the service of mankind, let us say to people of every condition, in every weakness and need. The Church has, so to say, declared herself the handmaid of humanity" (*ibid.*). Moreover this gives us light today, in this world where man is denied, where people prefer to take the road of Gnosticism, the road of Pelagianism, or of the "no flesh" — a God who did not take flesh — or of the "no God" — the Prometheian man who can walk on. We in our time can say the same things as Paul VI: the Church is the servant of man, the Church believes in Christ who came in the flesh and therefore serves man, loves man and believes in man. This is the inspiration of the great Paul VI.

Dear friends, it does us good to meet each other in the name of the Venerable Servant of God Paul VI! His witness nourishes within us the flame of love for Christ, of love for the Church, of the drive to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today with mercy, with patience, with courage and with joy. For this I thank you once again. I entrust you all to the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and I warmly bless you all, together with your loved ones, and especially your children and the sick.