



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MOZAMBIQUE, MADAGASCAR AND MAURITIUS
(4 - 10 SEPTEMBER 2019)

**MEETING WITH PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS,
CONSECRATED PERSONS AND SEMINARIANS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Collège de Saint Michel (Antananarivo)
Sunday, 8 September 2019

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

When they brought me this table, I thought it was time to eat, but no, it is to speak!

I thank you for your warm welcome. I would like before all else to greet all those priests and consecrated persons who could not be with us today due to poor health, advanced age or other reasons. Let us say a little prayer for them in silence...

I conclude my visit to Madagascar here with you. As I witness your joy, and think of everything else that I have seen during my brief stay on your island, my heart echoes the words spoken by Jesus in Luke's Gospel. Filled with joy, he exclaimed: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to little ones" (Lk 10:21). My joy has been confirmed by your testimonies, for even those things you see as problems are signs of a Church that is alive, a dynamic Church that strives each day to be a sign of the Lord's presence. A Church that, as Sister Suzanne said, tries each day to

be close to people, not to be removed from people, but to walk always with the people of God!

This leads us to remember with gratitude all those who in past years were unafraid to stake their lives on Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Today you share in their legacy. Before you, there were roots here: the roots of evangelization. You are their fruit. And you too will leave something behind for those yet to come. I think of the Vincentians, the Jesuits, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the La Salette Missionaries and so many other pioneer bishops, priests and consecrated men and women. I think too of the many lay persons who kept alive the flame of the faith in this land during the difficult days of persecution, when many missionaries and religious had to leave. This reminds us that our baptism is the first great sacrament that marked and consecrated us as God's children. Everything else is an expression and a manifestation of that first love, which we are constantly called to renew.

The words of the Gospel that I cited above are part of the Lord's prayer of praise as he welcomed back the seventy-two disciples from their mission. Like yourselves, those disciples accepted the challenge of being a Church that "goes forth". They came back with their bags full, to share everything that they saw and heard. You too dared to go forth, and you accepted the challenge of bringing the light of the Gospel to the different parts of this island.

I know that many of you live in difficult conditions and lack such essential services as water, electricity, roads and means of communication, or the financial resources needed for your life and pastoral activity. More than a few of you feel the burden of your apostolic labours and their effect on your health. Yet you have chosen to stand beside your people, to be close to your people, to remain in their midst. I thank you for this. I thank you for your witness of closeness to your people, for choosing to stay and not make your vocation a "stepping stone to a better life". Thank you for this. To remain there in the awareness, as Sister Suzanne said, that, "for all our difficulties and weaknesses, we remain fully committed to the great mission of evangelization". Consecrated persons, in the broad sense of the term, are women and men who have learned how to keep close to the Lord's heart and to the heart of their people. This is the key: to remain in the heart of the Lord and in the heart of our people!

Welcoming back his disciples and hearing of their joy, Jesus immediately praises and blesses his heavenly Father. This makes us see something basic about our vocation. We are men and women of praise. Consecrated persons are able to recognize and point out the presence of God wherever they find themselves. Even better, they are able to dwell in God's presence because they have learned how to savour, enjoy and share that presence.

In praise, we discover the beauty of our identity as part of a people. Praise frees disciples from obsessing about "what ought to be done" that can eat away at us. Praise restores our enthusiasm for mission and for being in the midst of our people. Praise helps us refine the "criteria" by which we take stock of ourselves and others, and all our missionary projects. In this way, it keeps us

from losing our evangelical “flavour”.

Often we can yield to the temptation of wasting our time talking about “successes” and “failures”, the “usefulness” of what we are doing or the “influence” we may have in society or elsewhere. These discussions end up taking over and, not infrequently, make us, like defeated generals, dream up vast, meticulously planned apostolic projects. We end up denying our own history – and the history of your people – which is glorious because it is a history of sacrifices, hope, daily struggle, a life consumed in fidelity to work, tiring as it may be (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 96).

In praising, we learn not to become “inebriated”, turning means into ends or the superfluous into the important. We gain the freedom to initiate processes rather than seeking to occupy spaces (cf. *ibid.*, 233), the freedom to foster whatever brings growth, development and fruitfulness to God’s people, instead of priding ourselves on pastoral “gains” that are easy and quick, but short-lived. Much of our life, our joy and our missionary fruitfulness have to do with Jesus’ invitation to praise. As that wise and holy man, Romano Guardini, often said: “The one who worships God in the depths of his heart and, when possible, by his concrete actions, lives in the truth. He might be mistaken about many things; he can be overwhelmed and dismayed by all his cares, but when all is said and done, his life rests on a sure foundation” (R. GUARDINI, *Glaubenserkenntnis*, Mainz, 3rd ed., 1997, p. 17), in praise, in adoration.

The seventy-two realized that the success of their mission depended on its being carried out “in the name of the Lord Jesus”. That was what amazed them. It had nothing to do with their own virtues, names or titles... There was no need to pass out their own propaganda; it was not their fame or their vision that stirred and saved other people. The joy of the disciples was born of their certainty that they were acting in the name of the Lord, sharing in his plan and participating in his life, which they loved so much that they wanted to share it with others.

It is interesting to see how Jesus sums up his disciples’ work by speaking of victory over the power of Satan, a power that we, by ourselves, could never overcome, if not in the name of Jesus! Each of us can testify to battles fought... including a few defeats. In all those situations that you mentioned when you spoke of your efforts to evangelize, you fight this same battle in the name of Jesus. In his name, you triumph over evil whenever you teach people to praise our heavenly Father, or simply teach the Gospel and the catechism, or visit the sick and bring the consolation of reconciliation. In Jesus’ name, you triumph whenever you give a child something to eat, or save a mother from despair at being alone in the face of everything, or provide work to the father of a family. The battle is won whenever you overcome ignorance by providing an education. You bring God’s presence whenever any of you helps show respect for all creatures, in their proper order and perfection, and prevents their being misused or exploited. It is a sign of God’s victory whenever you plant a tree or help bring drinkable water to a family. What a great sign of victory over evil it is, whenever you work to restore thousands of persons to good health!

Continue to fight these battles, but always in prayer and in praise.

There are also battles that we fight within ourselves. God circumvents the influence of the evil spirit, the spirit that very often inspires in us “an inordinate concern for our personal freedom and relaxation, which leads us to see our work as a mere appendage to our life, as if it were not part of our very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort, but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 78). As a result of this, instead of being men and women of praise, we become “professionals of the sacred”. Let us instead conquer the spirit of evil on its own terrain. Whenever it tells us to put our trust in financial security, spaces of power and human glory, let us respond with the evangelical responsibility and poverty that inspires us to give our lives for the mission (cf. *ibid.*, 76). Please, let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary joy!

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus praises the Father for having revealed these things to the “little ones”. We are indeed little, for our joy, our happiness, is found in precisely his revelation that those who are simple can “see and hear” what neither the intelligent nor prophets and kings were able to see and hear. It is God’s presence in those who are suffering and afflicted, those who hunger and thirst for justice, those who are merciful (cf. *Mt* 5:3-12; *Lk* 6:20-23). Happy are you, happy as a Church of the poor and for the poor, a Church imbued by the fragrance of her Lord, a Church that lives joyfully by preaching the Good News to the marginalized of the earth, to those who are closest to God’s heart.

Please convey to your communities my affection and my closeness, my prayers and my blessing. As I now bless you in the name of the Lord, I ask you to think of your communities and your places of mission, that the Lord may continue to speak of goodness to all, wherever they find themselves. May you continue to be a sign of his living presence in our midst!

Please, don’t forget to pray for me, and to ask others to do the same!

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Before finishing I would like to perform a duty of justice and of gratitude. This is the last of the nine addresses that were translated by Father Marcel. I am going to make him uncomfortable because I am also going to ask him to translate this words of thanks for Father Marcel [he turns to him] for the work that you did, and to thank you for clear but also free way that you interpreted my words. I thank you very much, and may the Lord bless you.