



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO PALERMO

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Foro Italico Umberto I, Palermo

Sunday, 3 October 2010

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I rejoice at being able to break with you the bread of the Word of God and of the Eucharist. I greet you all with affection and thank you for your warm welcome! I greet in particular your Pastor, Archbishop Paolo Romeo; I thank him for his words of welcome on behalf of you all and for the meaningful gift he has offered me. I also greet the Archbishops and Bishops present, the priests, the men and women Religious and the Representatives of the Ecclesial Associations and Movements. I address a respectful thought to Hon. Mr Diego Cammarata, the Mayor, grateful for his courteous greeting, to the Representative of the Government and to the Civil and Military Authorities, who have wished to honour our Meeting with their presence. A special "thank you" goes to all who have generously offered their collaboration for the organization and preparation of this day.

Dear friends, my Visit is taking place on the occasion of an important regional ecclesial Meeting of Young People and Families, whom I will meet this afternoon. But I have also come to share with you the joys and hopes, efforts and commitments, ideals and aspirations of this diocesan community. When the ancient Greeks landed in this area, as the Mayor mentioned in his greeting, they called it "Panormo" meaning the place looking out over the whole bay, a name that suggested safety, peace and calm. In coming to see you for the first time, my hope is that this City, drawing

inspiration from the most authentic values of its history and tradition, may always know how to make the hopes of serenity and peace, summed up in its name, come true for its inhabitants and for the entire nation.

I know that in Palermo, as in the whole of Sicily, difficulties, problems and worries are not lacking; I am thinking in particular of those who are actually living their lives in precarious conditions, because of unemployment, uncertainty about the future and physical and moral suffering and, as the Archbishop recalled, because of organized crime. Today I am among you to witness to my closeness and my remembrance in prayer. I am here to give you strong encouragement not to be afraid to witness clearly to the human and Christian values that are so deeply rooted in the faith and history of this territory and of its people.

Dear brothers and sisters, every liturgical assembly is a place of God's presence. Gathered together for the Holy Eucharist, disciples of the Lord are immersed in Christ's redeeming sacrifice, they proclaim that he is Risen, is alive and is the Giver of life, and witness that his Presence is grace, strength and joy. Let us open our hearts to his Word and welcome the gift of his presence! All the texts of this Sunday's Liturgy speak to us of faith, which is the foundation of the whole of Christian life. Jesus taught his disciples to grow in faith, to believe and to entrust themselves increasingly to him, in order to build their own lives on the rock. For this reason they asked him "increase our faith!" (Lk 17: 5). What they asked the Lord for is beautiful, it is the fundamental request: disciples do not ask for material gifts, they do not ask for privileges but for the grace of faith, which guides and illumines the whole of life; they ask for the grace to recognize God and to be in a close relationship with him, receiving from him all his gifts, even those of courage, love and hope.

Jesus, without directly answering their prayer, has recourse to a paradoxical image to express the incredible vitality of faith. Just as a lever raises something far heavier than its own weight, so faith, even a crumb of faith, can do unthinkable, extraordinary things, such as uproot a great tree and plant it in the sea (*ibid.*). Faith trusting in Christ, welcoming him, letting him transform us, following him to the very end makes humanly impossible things possible in every situation. The Prophet Habbakuk also bears witness to this in the First Reading. He implores the Lord, starting with a dreadful situation of violence, iniquity and oppression. And even in this difficult, insecure situation, the Prophet introduces a vision that offers an inside view of the plan that God is outlining and bringing to fulfilment in history: "He whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2: 4). The godless person, the one who does not behave in accordance with God, who trusts in his own power but is relying on a frail and inconsistent reality that will therefore give way, is destined to fall; the righteous person, on the other hand, trusts in a hidden but sound reality, he trusts in God and for this reason will have life.

In past centuries the Church in Palermo was enriched and enlivened by a fervent faith that found its loftiest and most successful expression in the Saints. I am thinking of St Rosalia, whom you

venerate and honour and who, from Mount Pellegrino, watches over your City of which she is the Patroness. I am also thinking of two great Saints of Sicily: Agatha and Lucy. Nor should it be forgotten that your religious sense has always inspired and guided family life, fostering values such as the capacity for giving themselves and solidarity to others, especially the suffering, and innate respect for life that constitutes a precious heritage to be jealously guarded and proposed anew especially in our time. Dear friends, preserve this precious treasure of faith of your Church; may Christian values always guide your decisions and your actions!

The second part of today's Gospel presents another teaching, a teaching of humility that is nevertheless closely linked to faith. Jesus invites us to be humble and suggests the example of a servant who has worked in the fields. When he returns home, the master asks him to go on working. According to the mentality of Jesus' time the master had every right to do this. The servant owed his master total availability; and the master did not feel under any obligation to him for having carried out the orders he had received. Jesus makes us aware that, before God, we are in a similar situation: we are God's servants, we are not his creditors but are always indebted to him, because we owe him everything since everything is a gift from him. Accepting and doing his will is the approach to have every day, at every moment of our life. Before God we must never present ourselves as if we believe we have done a service and deserve a great reward. This is an illusion that can be born in everyone, even in people who work very hard in the Lord's service, in the Church. Rather, we must be aware that in reality we never do enough for God. We must say, as Jesus' suggests: "we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17: 10). This is an attitude of humility that really puts us in our place and permits the Lord to be very generous to us. In fact, in another Gospel passage, he promises people that "he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them" (cf. Lk 12: 37). Dear friends, if we do God's will today with humility, without claiming anything from him, it will be Jesus himself who serves us, who helps us, who encourages us, who gives us strength and serenity.

In today's Second Reading the Apostle Paul too speaks of faith. Timothy is asked to have faith and, through it, to exercise charity. The disciple is also urged to rekindle in faith the gift of God that is in him through the laying on of Paul's hands, in other words the gift of Ordination, received so that he might carry out the apostolic ministry as a collaborator of Paul (cf. 2 Tm 1: 6). He must not let this gift be extinguished but must make it ever more alive through faith. And the Apostle adds: "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (v. 7).

Dear people of Palermo and dear Sicilians, your beautiful Island was one of the first regions of Italy to receive the faith of the Apostles, to receive the proclamation of the Word of God, to adhere to the faith in such a generous way that, even amidst difficulties and persecutions, the flower of holiness always sprang from it. Sicily was and is a land of Saints, belonging to every walk of life, who have lived the Gospel with simplicity and wholeness. To you lay faithful, I repeat: do not fear to live and to witness to the faith in the various contexts of society, in the many situations of human existence, especially in those that are difficult! May faith give you the power of God in order

to be ever confident and courageous, to go ahead with new determination, to take the necessary initiatives to give an ever more beautiful face to your land. And when you come up against the opposition of the world, may you hear the Apostle's words: "Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord" (v. 8). One should be ashamed of evil, of what offends God, of what offends man; one should be ashamed of the evil done to the Civil and Religious Community by actions that would prefer to remain in the shade! The temptation of discouragement and resignation comes to those who are weak in faith and those who confuse evil with good and to those who think that in the face of evil that is often profound there is nothing that can be done. On the contrary, those who are firmly founded on faith, who trust totally in God and who live in the Church are capable of conveying the devastating power of the Gospel. This was how the Saints who flourished in Palermo and throughout Sicily down the centuries behaved, as likewise the lay people and priests of today who are well known to you, such as, for example, Fr Pino Puglisi. May they always keep you united and nourish in each one the desire to proclaim, with word and deed, the presence and love of Christ. People of Sicily, look at your future with hope! Bring out the full radiance of the good that you desire, that you seek and that you possess! Live courageously the values of the Gospel to make the light of goodness shine out! With God's power everything is possible! May the Mother of Christ, Our Lady Hodegetria whom you so deeply venerate, help you and lead you to deep knowledge of her Son. Amen!

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