



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO GENOA

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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[Multimedia]

We have heard what Jesus tells the disciples before his Ascension: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Mt 28:18); the power of Jesus, the strength of God. This theme runs through today’s readings: in the first, Jesus says that it is not up to the disciples to know the “times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority”, but he promises them the “power” of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:7-8). In the second, Saint Paul speaks about the “immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe” and of the “working of his great might” (Eph 1:19). But in what does this strength, this power of God consist?

Jesus declares that there is a power “in heaven and on earth”. It is, first and foremost, the power *to connect heaven and earth*. Today we celebrate this mystery because when Jesus ascended to the Father, our human flesh crossed the threshold of heaven: our humanity is there, in God, forever. Therein lies our trust, because God will never distance himself from mankind. And we are consoled in the knowledge that in God, with Jesus, a place has been prepared for each of us: a destiny as risen children awaits us and for this, it is truly worth the while of living here below, seeking the things from above, where our Lord is found (cf. Col 3:1-2). This is what Jesus did for us through his power to connect earth to heaven.

But his power did not end once he ascended into heaven. It continues even today and it endures forever. In fact, just before ascending to the Father, Jesus said, “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). It is not just a saying, a simple reassurance like when we tell our friends

before leaving for a long trip: “I will be thinking of you”. No. Jesus is truly *with us* and *for us*. In heaven, he shows the Father his humanity, our humanity. He shows the Father his wounds, the price he paid for us, and thus, he “always lives to make intercessions” (Heb 7:25) on our behalf. This is the key word of the power of Jesus: intercession. Jesus, with the Father, intercedes on our behalf every day, in every moment; in every prayer, in each of our requests for forgiveness, especially in every Mass. Jesus intervenes: he shows the Father the signs of the life he offered — as I have said — his wounds, and he intercedes, obtaining mercy for us. He is our “advocate” (cf. Jn 2:1), and when we have some important “cause”, we would do well to entrust it to him and to say, “Lord Jesus, intercede for me, intercede for us, intercede for that person, intercede for that situation...”.

Jesus also gave this capacity to intercede to us, to his Church that has the power and also the duty to intercede, to pray for everyone. We can ask ourselves, each of us can ask him- or herself: ‘Do I pray? And everyone, as the Church, as Christians: do we exercise this power by bringing people and situations to God? The world needs this. We ourselves need it. We spend our day running around and working a lot. We put effort into many things. However, we run the risk of reaching home in the evening weary and with our soul weighed down, similar to a ship laden with merchandise which, after an arduous voyage, returns to port with the sole desire of docking and switching off the lights. Always living between the rushing about and the things to be done, we can become lost, withdrawn into ourselves and anxious over nothing. In order to avoid being drowned by this “pain of living”, let us remember to “drop the anchor in God” every day. Let us take to him our burdens, people and situations; let us entrust everything to him. This is the strength of prayer which connects heaven and earth, which permits the Lord to enter into our time.

Christian prayer is not a way of being more at peace with oneself or finding some inner harmony. We pray in order to take everything to God, to entrust the world to him. Prayer is intercession. It is not tranquility; it is charity. It is asking, seeking, knocking (cf. Mt 7:7). It is putting ourselves on the line to intercede, insisting assiduously with God, one for the other (cf. Acts 1:14). To intercede without tiring is our first responsibility because prayer is the power which moves the world forward. It is our mission, a mission which requires effort and, at the same time, brings peace. This is our power: not to dominate or to cry out more loudly, according to the logic of this world, but rather to exercise the gentle power of prayer which can even end wars and bring about peace. Just as Jesus always intercedes for us with the Father, so should we, his disciples, never tire of praying to bring earth closer to heaven.

After “intercession”, a second key word emerges from the Gospel which reveals Jesus’ power: *proclamation*. The Lord sends his own to proclaim him with the sole power of the Holy Spirit: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*” (Mt 28:19). Go! It is an act of utmost trust in his own. Jesus trusts us. He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves! He sends us forth, despite our shortcomings. He knows we will never be perfect and that, if we wait to become better in order to evangelize, we will never begin.

However, it is important to Jesus that we overcome one great imperfection from the onset: closure. Because the Gospel cannot be locked up and sealed off, because God's love is dynamic and seeks to reach everyone. In order to proclaim then, it is necessary to go out, to go beyond ourselves. With the Lord, we cannot be calm and comfortable within our world or our nostalgic recollections of the past. With him, we are forbidden to lull ourselves in acquired confidence. For Jesus, confidence means going forth with trust. That is where his strength is revealed. Because the Lord does not value ease and comfort; he always inconveniences and challenges [us]. He wants us to set forth, free from the temptation of being satisfied once we are doing well and have everything under control.

"Go", Jesus tells us, even today. In Baptism he conferred upon *each of us* the power to proclaim. Thus, going out into the world with the Lord is part of the Christian identity. It is not only for priests, nuns or the consecrated. It is for all Christians. It is our identity; going into the World with the Lord is our identity. Christians are not stationary, but on a journey: with the Lord towards others. However, Christians are not sprinters running madly, or conquerors who must arrive before the others. They are pilgrims, missionaries, "hopeful marathon runners", meek but decisive in walking, trusting and, at the same time, active, creative, but always respectful, resourceful and open, hard-working and supportive. Let us walk the roads of the world in this manner!

As for the original disciples, our places of proclamation are the roads of the world. It is there above all that the Lord is waiting to be known today. Just as then, he desires the announcement to be brought not through our strength, but rather through *his* strength: not with the strength of the world, but with the limpid and gentle strength of joyful witness. And this is urgent, brothers and sisters! Let us ask the Lord for the grace not to become fossilized on issues that are not central, but to dedicate ourselves fully to the urgency of the mission. Let us leave to others the idle gossip and false disputes of those who only listen to themselves, and let us work in a practical manner for the common good and for peace. Let us take up the challenge with courage, confident that there is more joy in giving than in receiving (cf. Acts 20:35) May the risen and living Christ who always intercedes for us be the strength of our setting forth, the courage of our journey.