



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH

(26 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 2017)

### **MEETING WITH PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND CONSECRATED MEN AND WOMEN, SEMINARIANS AND NOVICES**

*Holy Rosary Church (Dhaka)*

*Saturday, 2 December 2017*

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#### **[Multimedia]**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I thank Archbishop Moses Costa for his introduction and you for your talks. [I have here an eight-page written address...](#) But we came here to listen to the Pope, not to get bored! So I will give the address to the Cardinal to have it translated into Bengali, and I will talk to you from the heart. I don't know if it will be better or worse, but believe me, it will be less boring!

When I entered and was greeting all of you, I thought of an image used by the prophet Isaiah: It is the first reading that we will hear next Tuesday. In those days, a shoot shall come out from the house of Israel. That shoot will grow and be filled with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord (cf. *Is 11:1-2*). We can say that Isaiah here describes the overall life of faith, the life of service to God. And by speaking of the life of faith and of service to God, he includes you, because you are men and women of faith, men and women who serve God.

Let's begin with the shoot. A shoot still in the ground, but sprouting from the seed. The seed is neither yours nor mine: God sows the seed and God makes it grow. Each one of us can say: "I am that shoot". True, but not because of your own merits, but that of the seed which makes you grow.

What do I have to do? Water that seed! So that it can grow into that spiritual fullness. That is what you have to give as your witness.

How can we water the seed? By caring for it. By caring for the seed and caring for the shoot that begins to sprout! By caring for the vocation that we have received. As we care for a child, as we care for a sick person, as we care for an elderly person. A vocation is cared for by human tenderness. If in our communities, in our presbyterates, this dimension of human tenderness is lacking, the shoot stays small, it doesn't grow, and it can even wither. Caring tenderly. Because each brother of the presbyterate, each brother of the episcopal conference, each brother and sister of my religious community, each brother seminarian is a seed of God. And God looks upon that seed with a father's tender love.

True, at night the enemy can steal in and sow other seed, and there is the risk that the good seed will be choked by the bad. How ugly are those weeds in our presbyterates... How ugly are those weeds in our Episcopal Conferences... How ugly are those weeds in our religious communities and seminaries. We need to care for the shoot, the shoot of the good seed, and to watch how it grows. To keep seeing how it distinguishes itself from the bad seed and the weeds.

One of you – I think it was Marcelius – spoke of “discerning every day how my vocation is growing”. Caring means discerning. Realizing that as the plant grows, if it goes in one direction, it grows well; if instead it goes in another direction, it grows poorly. And considering whether it is growing badly, or if there are groups or individuals or situations that threaten its growth.

Discerning. We can only discern when we have a heart that prays. Praying. Caring means praying. It means asking the sower of the seed to teach me how to water it. And if I am troubled, or dozing off, asking him to water it a little for me. Praying means asking the Lord to take care of us. To give us the tender love that we must give to others. This is the first idea that I would like to share with you: the idea of *caring for the seed*, so that the shoot will grow to the fullness of the wisdom of God. To care for it attentively, with prayer, with discernment. To care for it with tender love. Because that is how God cares for us: with a Father's care.

The second thought that comes to me is that in this garden of the kingdom of God there is more than one shoot: there are thousands and thousands of shoots. All of us are shoots. *It is not easy to be a community*. It is not easy. Human passions, faults and limitations always threaten community life. They threaten peace. The community of consecrated life, the community of the seminary, the community of the presbyterate and the community of the Episcopal Conference need to be able to defend themselves from all kinds of division. Yesterday we thanked God for the example that Bangladesh has been able to give in the area of interreligious dialogue. One of the speakers quoted a phrase of Cardinal Tauran, who said that Bangladesh is the best example of harmony in interreligious dialogue [applause]. This applause is for Cardinal Tauran. If we said that yesterday about interreligious dialogue, are we going to do otherwise within our own faith, our Catholic confession, our communities? Here too, Bangladesh must be an example of harmony!

There are many enemies of harmony, many indeed. I always like to mention one, which can suffice as an example. Maybe someone can criticize me for saying the same thing over and over, but for me it is essential. The enemy of harmony in a religious community, a presbyterate, an episcopate and a seminary is the spirit of gossip. This is not something I invented: two thousand years ago, a certain James spoke about it in a letter that he wrote to the Church. The tongue, my brothers and sisters, the tongue. What destroys a community is speaking ill of others. Dwelling on the faults of others. Not speaking to the person, but saying things to others and thus creating an environment of distrust, an environment of suspicion, an environment in which there is no peace, but division. There is one image I like to use in describing the spirit of gossip. It is terrorism. Yes, terrorism, because those who speak ill of others do not do so publicly. The terrorist does not say publicly: "I'm a terrorist". And those who speak ill of others, do so in secret: they speak to someone, throw the bomb and off they go. And the bomb wreaks havoc. And the bomb-thrower goes off serenely to throw another bomb. Dear sister, dear brother, when you want to speak ill of another person, bite your tongue! Most probably, it will swell up, but you will not wrong your brother or your sister.

The spirit of division. How many times in Saint Paul's letters do we read of the sorrow that Paul felt when this spirit entered the Church. Certainly, you can ask me: "But, Father, if I see a fault in a brother or sister, and I want to correct it, or tell them about it, but I can't throw a bomb... then what can I do?" You can do two things: do not forget them. The first, if it is possible – since it isn't always possible – is to tell that person, face-to-face. Jesus gives us this advice. True enough, someone can say to me: "No, it can't be done, Father, because he or she is a complicated person". Complicated, just like you! Well then, it can be that, for the sake of prudence, it won't help. Second principle: if you can't say it to the person, say it to someone who can do something about it, but do so privately, with charity. How many communities – and I'm not repeating hearsay, I'm talking about what I've seen – how many communities have I seen destroyed by the spirit of gossip! Please, bite your tongue in time!

The third thing I wanted to say – at least it is not so boring... You'll get the boring stuff there in the written text – is to try to have, to ask for and to have, a *spirit of joy*. Without joy, we cannot serve God. I ask each of you – but answer me silently, not out loud: "How is your joy going?" I assure you that it is truly sad to meet priests, consecrated men or women, seminarians, bishops who are bitter, gloomy. They make you want to ask: "What did you have with your breakfast this morning... vinegar?" Sourpusses. That bitterness of heart, when the bad seed comes and says: "Ah, look, look whom they made a Superior, whom they made a bishop... And they overlooked me!" There is no joy there. Saint Teresa - the big one – has a saying, and it is a curse. She says it to her nuns: "Woe to the nun who says: They did me an injustice!" When she would meet a Sister who grumbled because "They didn't give me what they should have", or "They didn't promote me", "They didn't make me prioress", or some such thing. Woe to that nun, she is on the wrong road.

Joy. Joy also at times of difficulty. A joy that, if it cannot be a smile because the pain is so great,

is peace. I think of the scene of the other Teresa – the little one – Theresa of the Child Jesus.

Every evening she had to walk to the refectory with an old, unpleasant, irritable and sick nun, poor thing, who complained about everything. And if Theresa touched her anywhere, the other nun would say: “No, that hurts!” One evening, as she was walking with her through the cloister, from a nearby house she heard the music of a party, the music of people who were having a good time, good people, as she too had done and seen her sisters doing. She imagined the people dancing and she thought: “This is my great joy, and I would not change it for any other”. Even when there are problems or difficulties in the community – having at times to put up with a Superior who is a bit odd – at those times, to be able to say: “I am happy, Lord. I am happy”. That was what Saint Alberto Hurtado used to say.

Heartfelt joy. Believe me, I am deeply touched when I meet elderly priests, bishops or sisters who have lived life to the full. Their eyes are indescribable, so full of joy and peace. Others, who have not lived their life that way, well, God is good, God will take care of them, but they lack that twinkle in the eye that you see in those whose lives were filled with joy. Try to look for this – it is particularly evident in women – try to look for this in the elderly Sisters, in those Sisters who spent their entire life in service, with great joy and peace. They have mischievous, twinkling eyes... Because they have the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The little shoot, in these elderly men and women, has become the fullness of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Reflect on this next Tuesday, when you hear the reading of the Mass, and ask yourself: Am I caring for the shoot? Am I watering the shoot, am I caring for the shoot in others? Do I see the danger of becoming a terrorist, and so do I make every effort never to speak ill of others and to be open to the gift of joy?

I pray for all of you that, like good wine, life will age you fully and that your eyes will shine with mischief, joy and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for me, as I pray for you.

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### **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am very happy to be with you! I thank Archbishop Moses [Costa] for his warm greeting in your name. I especially thank those who offered testimonies and shared with us their love for God. I also express my gratitude to Father Mintu [Palma] for composing the prayer that we will shortly recite to Our Lady. As the Successor of Peter it is my task to confirm you in faith. But I want you

to know that, through your words and presence here today, you also confirm me in faith and bring me great joy.

The Catholic community in Bangladesh is small. But you are like the mustard seed that God brings to fruition in his own time. I rejoice to see how this seed is growing and to witness first-hand the deep faith which God has given you (cf. *Mt 13:31-32*). I think of the dedicated and faithful missionaries who planted and tended this seed of faith for almost five hundred years. I will shortly visit the cemetery here and pray for these men and women who so generously served this local Church. As I look out among you, I see missionaries who continue this holy work. I also see many vocations born in this land; they are a sign of the graces with which God is blessing your land. I am particularly pleased by the presence, and the prayers, of the cloistered nuns among us.

It is good that our meeting takes place in this ancient Church of the Holy Rosary. The rosary is a beautiful meditation on the mysteries of faith that are the lifeblood of the Church and a prayer that shapes our spiritual lives and our apostolic service. Whether we are priests, religious, consecrated men or women, seminarians or novices, the prayer of the rosary inspires us, in union with Mary, to give our lives completely to Christ. It invites us to share in Mary's *attentiveness* to God at the annunciation, Christ's *compassion* for all humanity as he hangs upon the cross, and the Church's *rejoicing* as she receives the Risen Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Mary's attentiveness.* In all of history, has there ever been anyone as attentive as Mary was at the annunciation? God prepared her for that moment and she responded in love and trust. So too the Lord has prepared us and called each of us by name. Responding to that call is a lifelong process. Every day we have to learn to be more attentive to the Lord in prayer, meditating on his word and seeking to discern his will. I know that your pastoral work and your apostolates demand much of you, and that your days are often long and leave you tired. But we cannot bear Christ's name, or share in his mission, unless we remain first and foremost men and women rooted in love, fired by love, through a personal encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and the words of sacred Scripture. Father Abel, you reminded us of this when you spoke of the importance of fostering an intimate relationship with Jesus, for there we experience his mercy and find renewed strength for our service to others.

Attentiveness to the Lord allows us to see the world through his eyes and thus to become more sensitive to the needs of those whom we serve. We begin to understand their hopes and joys, fears and burdens, we see more clearly the many talents, charisms and gifts they bring to the building up of the Church in faith and holiness. Brother Lawrence, when you spoke of your ashram, you helped us to see the importance of assisting people to satisfy their spiritual thirst. May all of you, in the great variety of your apostolates, be a source of spiritual refreshment and inspiration to those you serve, and enable them to share their gifts ever more fully with one another in advancing the mission of the Church.

*Christ's compassion.* The rosary draws us into a meditation on the passion and death of Jesus. By entering more deeply into these sorrowful mysteries, we come to know their saving power and are confirmed in our call to share it by our lives of com-*passion* and self-giving. Priesthood and religious life are not a career. They are not a vehicle for personal advancement. They are a service, a share in Christ's own sacrificial love for his flock. By conforming ourselves daily to that we love, we come to appreciate that our lives are not our own. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (cf. *Gal 2:20*).

We embody this compassion by accompanying people, especially in their moments of suffering and trial, helping them to find Jesus. Father Franco, thank you for drawing this to the fore – each of us is called to be a missionary, bringing Christ's mercy and love to all, especially those on the peripheries of our society. I am especially grateful for the many ways in which so many of you are engaged in the areas of social outreach, health care and education, serving the needs of your local communities and of the many migrants and refugees coming to your country. Your service to the wider community, in particular to those most in need, is a precious service to the building of a culture of encounter and solidarity.

*The Church's rejoicing.* Lastly, the rosary fills us with joy in Christ's triumph over death, his ascension to the right hand of the Father and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our world. The whole of our ministry is directed to proclaiming the joy of the Gospel. In our lives and apostolates, we are all too aware of the problems of the world and the sufferings of humanity, but we never lose confidence in the power of Christ's love to prevail over evil and the Prince of Lies who tries to deceive us. Never be discouraged by your own failures or by the challenges of ministry. If you remain attentive to the Lord in prayer and persevere in offering Christ's compassion to your brothers and sisters, then the Lord will surely fill your hearts with the comforting joy of his Holy Spirit.

Sister Mary Chandra, you shared with us the joy that flows from your religious vocation and the charism of your religious congregation. Marcellus, you too spoke of the love you and your fellow seminarians have for your vocation to be priests. Both of you reminded us that we are all asked daily to renew and deepen our joy in the Lord by striving to imitate him ever more fully. In the beginning, this may seem daunting, but it fills our hearts with spiritual joy. For each day becomes an opportunity to begin again, to respond anew to the Lord. Never lose heart, for the Lord's patience is for our salvation (cf. *2 Pet 3:15*)! Rejoice in the Lord always!

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your fidelity in serving Christ and his Church through the gift of your lives. I assure all of you of my prayers, as I ask you to pray for me. Let us now turn to Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, asking that she may obtain for all of us the grace to grow in holiness and to be ever more joyful witnesses of the power of the Gospel to bring healing, reconciliation and peace to our world.

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