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Pope Francis concelebrates at Mass with the College of Cardinals on his eightieth birthday, and asks for the grace of memory

Today is Pope Francis' his eightieth birthday, and on this occasion the College of Cardinals concelebrated Mass with the Supreme Pontiff at 8 a.m. in the Pauline Chapel, during which Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College, addressed words of congratulations and affection to the Holy Father.

In his homily the Pope commented on the day's readings, focusing on the theme of memory and the invitation in the Letter to the Hebrews to "remember" and to pause a moment on the journey to look at those who preceded us before going forward. "We need to ask for this grace: not to forget. It proper of love not to forget; it is proper of love to keep always in view the great good we have received; it is proper of love to look to history: to where we are from, our parents, our ancestors, the journey of faith. ... And this memory is good for us, as it renders even more intense our vigilant wait for Christmas. A day of calm".

This memory is that which St. Matthew reflects upon in his Gospel, when he describes the genealogy of Christ, from the selection of His people: "Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham". "The chosen people, who journey towards the promise with the strength of the covenant, of the successive covenants that are made. Thus is the journey of the Christian", explained the Pope. "A promise was made to us, it was said to us: journey in my presence and be irreprehensible like our Father. A promise that will be fulfilled, in the end, but that is consolidated with every covenant we make with the Lord, a covenant of faithfulness; and we will realise that it was not we who chose; we will understand that all of us have been chosen. Election, promise and the covenant are the pillars of Christ memory, this looking behind so as to go forward".

Memory encloses a story, "a very great story of grace; but also a story of sin. On the way we always find grace and sin. Here, in the history of salvation there are great sinners, in this genealogy, and there are saints. And we too, in our life, will find the same: moments of great faithfulness to the Lord, joy in service, and some ugly moments of infidelity, of sin that make us feel the need for salvation. And this is also our security, because when we are in need of salvation, we confess our faith, we make a confession of faith: 'I am a sinner, but You can save me, You can carry me forward'. And in this way we go ahead in the joy of hope".

In Advent we have started to follow this path, vigilantly awaiting the Lord. Today we stop, we look behind, we

see that the journey has been good, that the Lord has not disappointed us, that the Lord is faithful. We see also that both in history and in our own life there have been beautiful moments of faithfulness and ugly moments of sin. But the Lord is there, with His hand reaching to help us up again and to say to us, 'Go on!'. And this is Christian life: go ahead, towards the definitive encounter. This journey of such great intensity, vigilantly awaiting the Lord, does not take away from us the grace of memory, of looking behind at everything that the Lord has done for us, for the Church, in the history of salvation".

The Pope concluded by explaining that although the reading of genealogy could appear dull, it was necessary to recover the "grace of memory", and commented that St. Paul, who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews, said, "in your struggle against in you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood". "A little humour from this inspired writer to help us go forward. May the Lord give us this grace".

After the Eucharist the Holy Father addressed the cardinals to thank them for their greetings and their presence, and added:

"For some days some words come to mind, which seem ugly: *old age*. It is frightening, at least: frightening. Yesterday too, as a gift, Msgr. Cavaliere gave me Cicerone's *De senectute* – another drop... I remember what I said to you on 15 March [2013], in our first meeting: 'Old age is the seat of life's wisdom'. I hope that for me too it will be this. I hope it will be like this!

"There also comes to mind", he continued, "How it came so soon – that poem by Pliny, I think: '*Tacito pede lapsa vetustas*' [Ovid]: with silent steps old age comes to you. It is a blow! But when one thinks of it as a stage in life which is for giving joy, wisdom, hope, one begins to live again. And there comes to mind another poem that I cited to you that day: 'Old age is calm and religious', '*Es ist ruhig, das Alter, und fromm*' [Hölderlin]. Pray that mine may be thus: calm, religious and fruitful. And also joyful. Thank you".
