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The Pope's homily: being Christian means, above all, being a witness to Jesus

In his homily pronounced in the parish of Santa Maria a Setteville, the Pope spoke about the value of witness in the light of the words of St. John Baptist upon seeing that Jesus was coming to him: "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me'". "This is the Messiah. He bears witness", said Francis. "And some of the disciples, hearing this witness – disciples of John – followed Jesus; they went after Him and they were content: 'We have found the Messiah'. They felt the presence of Jesus. But why did they meet Jesus? Because there was a witness, there was a man who bore witness to Jesus".

"The same happens in our lives", he continued. "There are Christians who profess that Jesus is God; there are many priests who profess that Jesus is God, many bishops. ... But do they all bear witness to Jesus? Or is being Christian like ... a way of living, like another, like being a supporter of a team? Or like having a philosophy? 'I observe these commandments, I am Christian, I must do this...'. Being Christian, first of all, is bearing witness to Jesus. And this is what the Apostles did: they bore witness to Jesus, and this is why Christianity spread throughout the world. Witness and martyrdom: the same thing. One can bear witness on a small scale, and some arrive at the great, giving their lives in martyrdom, like the Apostles".

"But the Apostles did not attend a course to become witnesses to Jesus; they had not studied, they did not go to university. They had felt the Spirit within, and followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they were faithful to this. But they were sinners, all of them! All twelve were sinners. 'No, father, only Judas!'. No, poor man. We do not know what happened after his death, because God's mercy was there then too. But they were all sinners, all of them. Envious, there was jealousy among them: 'No, I must be first, and you second'; and two of them spoke to their mother so that she would go and speak to Jesus, so that He might give the first place to her sons. ... They were like this, with all the sins. They were also traitors, because when Jesus was captured, they all ran away, full of fear; they hid, they were afraid. And Peter, who knew he was the head, felt the need to come closer to see what was happening; and when the priest's helper said, 'But you were there too', he said, 'No, no, no!' He denied Jesus, he betrayed Jesus. Peter! The first Pope. He betrayed Jesus. And these are the witnesses! Yes, because they were witnesses to the salvation that Jesus brings, and all of them were transformed by this salvation; they let themselves be saved. It is beautiful when, at the side of the lake, Jesus performs that miracle [the miraculous catch], and Peter says, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man'. Being a witness does not mean being a saint, but being a poor man, a poor woman who says, 'Yes, I am a sinner, but Jesus is the Lord and I

bear witness to Him, and I try to do good every day, to correct my life, to follow the right road”.

“I would like to leave you a message”, he added, “We all understand what I said: sinners and witnesses. But, reading the Gospel, I do not find a certain type of sin among the Apostles. Some were violent, who wanted to set fire to a village that had not welcomed them. ... They had many sins: they were traitors, cowards. ... But there is one I do not find. They were not gossips. They did not speak ill of others, and they did not speak ill of each other. In this they were good. ... I think of our communities: how many times, this sin, of ‘skinning’ each other, of gossiping, and believing oneself superior to others and speaking ill of them behind their backs. This, in the Gospel, they did not do. They did bad things, they betrayed the Lord, but this, no. In the parish too, in a community where we know that someone has behaved badly, that someone has done something, but then confesses, converts ... We are all sinners. But a community where there are gossips is a community that is incapable of bearing witness”.

“I will say this only: do you want the perfect parish? Then no gossip. ... If you have something against someone, tell them face to face, or say it to the parish priest; but not among yourselves. This is the sign that the Holy Spirit is in a parish. The other sins, we all have them. ... But what destroys a community, like woodworm, is gossip behind a person’s back”.

“I hope that in this day of my visit this community will resolve not to gossip. And when you feel like gossiping, bite your tongue. ... A parish where there is no gossip is the perfect parish: it is a parish of sinners, yes, but also of witnesses. And this is the witness that the first Christians gave: ‘How they loved each other, how they loved each other’. They loved each other in this at least. Begin with this. May the Lord give you this gift, this grace: never, never speak ill of each other. Thank you”.
