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Pastoral visit to the Roman parish of Santa Maddalena di Canossa (Borgata Ottavia)

The Holy Father's homily

The Holy Father's words during the various encounters in the parish

This afternoon, Second Sunday of Lent, the Holy Father Francis made a pastoral visit to the parish of Santa Maddalena di Canossa, in the Borgata Ottavia quarter of Rome.

Upon arrival, at around 15.50, the Pope met with children and young people of the catechism in the parish sports field. Then, in the crypt, the Holy Father greeted the elderly and the sick; then in the parish theatre he met married couples who baptised their children in 2016. In addition, he briefly greeted the altar boys, priests from the 36th Prefecture, to which the parish belongs, and some religious sisters, Daughters of Charity (Canossians), accompanied by the Superior General. Finally, the Holy Father confessed some penitents.

At 18.00, the Pope presided at Holy Mass in the parish Church. After the proclamation of the Gospel, the Pope pronounced an off-the-cuff homily. At the end of his visit, at around 19.45, the Holy Father returned to the Vatican.

The following is the transcript of his homily and the words the Pope addressed to the various groups in the parish.

The Holy Father's homily

In this passage of the Gospel (cf. Matthew 17:1-9), reference is made twice to the beauty of Jesus, of Jesus-God, of luminous Jesus, of Jesus full of joy and of life. First, in the vision: "He was transfigured". He was

transfigured before them, before the disciples: "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light". And Jesus transforms, He is transfigured. The second time, while they are coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to speak of this vision before He rose from the dead, or rather, the Resurrection that Jesus will have – He had, but that moment He was still not resurrected – the same luminous, brilliant face, it will be like that! But what did He want to say? That between this transfiguration, so beautiful, and that resurrection, there will be another face of Jesus: there will be a face that is not so beautiful, there will be a face that is ugly, disfigured, tortured, scorned, bloodied by the crown of thorns. ... All the body of Jesus will indeed be like something to be discarded. Two transfigurations and in the middle Jesus Crucified, the cross. We must look at the cross well! And Jesus-God - "this is my Son", "this is my Son, the beloved" – Jesus, the Son of God, God Himself, in Whom the Father is well pleased: He annihilated Himself to save us! And to use a very strong, a very strong word, perhaps one of the strongest words of the New Testament, a word that Paul uses: He was made sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Sin is the worst thing; sin is an offense to God, a affront to God; it is like saying to God: "I don't care about you, I prefer this ..." 'And Jesus was made sin, He annihilated Himself, He lowered Himself to this ... And to prepare the disciples not to be scandalised at seeing Him thus, on the cross, He made this transfiguration.

We are used to talking about sins: when we go to Confession – "I committed this sin, I committed another ..." ; and also in Confession, when we are forgiven, we feel we are forgiven because He took on this sin in the Passion: He became sin. We are used to talking about others' sins. It's an awful thing ... Instead of talking about the sins of others, I don't say we make ourselves sin, because we can't, but we should look at our sins and at Him, He Who made Himself become sin".

This is the path to Easter, towards the Resurrection to go ahead with the certainty of this transfiguration; to see this most luminous and beautiful face, that will be the same in the Resurrection and the same we will find in Heaven, and also to see this other face, which was made sin, He paid in this way for us all. Jesus made Himself become sin, He made Himself God's malediction for us; the blessed Son, in the Passion became the accursed, because He took upon Himself our sins (cf. Galatians 3:10-14). Let us think about this. How much love! How much love! And let us think also of the beauty of the transfigured face of Jesus we will encounter in Heaven.

And may this contemplation of the two faces of Jesus – the transfigured and the one made sin, accursed – encourage us to go ahead on the path of life, on the journey of Christian life. May it encourage us to ask for forgiveness for our sins, not to sin so much... May it encourage us in particular to have trust, because if He became sin it is because He took our sins upon Himself. And He is always willing to forgive us. We only have to ask.

The Holy Father's words during the various encounters in the parish

Meeting with children and young people studying catechism

Elisabetta: My name is Elisabetta. Dear Pope Francis, when did your first encounter with Jesus begin?

Patrizio: My name is Patrizio. Dear Pope Francis, are you happy to be the Pope? Or would you have preferred to be a simple priest in a small parish?

Sara: My name is Sara. Dear Pope Francis, is there anything that frightens you or that you are afraid of?

Edoardo: My name is Edoardo. Dear Pope Francis, what have been the most beautiful moments of your life?

Parish priest: This is one from the group of adolescents, post-confirmation:

Camilla: My name is Camilla. Dear Pope, we realise that at times we use *smartphones* too much, or are always

in front of the television. We also like going out with our friends, though, but at times we do not succeed in listening to each other and to ourselves. How can we solve this problem?

Pope Francis: The first question was. when did you first encounter Jesus? That was it, wasn't it? I would respond with another question: why, every time that you approach Jesus, do you realise that He was there first? If we can draw closer to Jesus, it is because He drew close to us first. He always makes the first step. Do you understand this? Does Jesus refuse to be with us? I am asking you...

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Good. Does Jesus wait for us? Does He wait or doesn't He?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: But does He just wait for us, or does He do something else? [One says: "He comes towards us"] He comes towards us! Well said! Who said that? You are good! Well done! Jesus always comes towards us. And if you see Jesus coming from this side, and you are a bit silly and look in the other direction, does Jesus go away?

Children: No! He helps you!

Pope Francis: Again!

Children: No!

Pope Francis: You, what does Jesus do? You said it well...

Child: He helps you!

Pope Francis: Ti prende per l'orecchio e ti fa così? Does He take you by the ear and do this? [makes gesture]

Children: No! He makes you understand what you have done wrong.

Pope Francis: Good. He speaks to the heart, He makes you understand what love is. And if you do not want to hear Him, what does He do? Does He go away?

Children: No.

Pope Francis: He stays. He stays there. He is patient. Jesus always waits. And this is the answer to your question. We go towards Jesus, but we discover that He came towards us first. He was there waiting for us And He speaks to us. But He is always there, always there, always there. And if you do something bad, does He send you away?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No?

Children: He forgives you ...

Pope Francis: Ah... this is a beautiful word, that you have said...

Children: He forgives you!

Pope Francis: And if you ... You have to say to Him that you are sorry for doing these things, don't you?

Children: Yes.

Pope Francis: And He forgives you. You repent, and He forgives you. But it is always Jesus Who approaches first.

Child: He is always in our hearts.

Pope Francis: Louder, I didn't hear...

Child: He is always in our hearts.

Pope Francis: He is always in our hearts. He never abandons us. He is always with us. Always with us. In the good moments He is with us, when we play, when we are happy, is He with us? Loud!

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: And in the bad moments in life too?

Children: Yes, He consoles us, He stays close to us and consoles us.

Pope Francis: Good, He consoles us. It is true, that is how Jesus is. Thank you, good answer. Good question. Thank you for the question! The second one was...

Parish priest: Pope, or priest in a small parish ...

Pope Francis: But... you know that you don't study to become Pope. Do you study or not?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No! And this question too: do you pay to become Pope?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: I can't year you...

Children: No!

Pope Francis: You don't pay? If you have a heap of money and go there, and give them to the cardinals, will they make you Pope for this?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No. But if you don't study, and you don't pay, who makes you Pope?

Children: God.

Pope Francis: God. And tell me, all of you: who was the first Pope, what was he called?

Children: Peter.

Pope Francis: Peter was a saint, wasn't he?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Was he always a saint?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No? Did he do something bad?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: What did he do? The worst thing...

Children: He said that he didn't know Jesus!

Pope Francis: He said that he didn't know Jesus, he denied Jesus. A bad, bad sin! And this sinner, how did they make him Pope?

Jesus chose who He wanted to be the Pope in this time, in another time He chooses another, and another, and another... But the question: I, who was chosen to do this job, do I like it or not? I like it, and I also liked it when I was priest in a parish, rector of the faculty and also parish priest, both of them: I liked it a lot. I also liked the school of catechism, the Children's Mass ... I liked it. Being a priest is something I have always liked a lot. So, which is best: being the Pope or being a priest? Think hard, which is better?

Children: The Pope...

Pope Francis: Haven't you understood?

Children: Both of them...

Pope Francis: Both of them: what God wills. What the Lord gives you is good, because when the Lord gives you a task to do, a job, to be the pastor of a parish, or of a diocese, or to be the Pope, pastor, there, He gives you a task. And what does the Lord ask of you when He makes you a parish priest or a bishop? What does He ask you? To do what?

Children: To bring peace.

Pope Francis: To bring peace. More...

Children: To bring the Word...

Pope Francis: To teach the Word of God, to do catechesis... what else? You, loud! [child says: "To love"] To love, To love, to make a community of love, so that everyone loves each other.

Children: Help your neighbour... Bring peace to the world...

Pope Francis: Bring peace to the world: but this, does only the Pope do this, or must we all do it?

Children: All of us!

Pope Francis: Everyone! And how do we start to bring peace to the world? In the family, at school, with your friend, when you play with others ... always peace. And if you get angry with your friend at school, is this bringing peace?

Children: No.

Pope Francis: What must you do if you get angry?

Child: If you get angry with a friend, you must make peace and it all ends there!

Pope Francis: Good! If you get angry with a friend, as he said, you must make peace and it all ends there! You are good! Thank you. The third question... But before moving on to the third, something about peace. When couples argue... At times you will have heard your mum and dad arguing about something: this is normal, it happens. There are always things to argue about, aren't there? But what should they do afterwards?

Children: They should make peace!

Pope Francis: Make peace. And you, tell your parents ...

Child:...that they shouldn't argue any more.

Pope Francis: No. "If you argue, make peace before the day is out". Okay? This is the advice you should give to your parents. Let's see if you have learned well: what was the advice? If you must argue...

Children: ... make peace before the day is out!

Pope Francis: Before the day is out.

Child: Also because it isn't nice to argue.

Pope Francis: It's ugly, it's ugly. What is?

Children: Arguing...

Pope Francis: Arguing is ugly, but it happens, it happens. Always. Because we are all sinners, aren't we? But ...

Child: ...swearing and blaspheming...

Pope Francis: Well, blaspheming is worse. Swearing isn't nice, but a bit less so. But blaspheming: never blaspheme! Never ever! Swearing is ugly, but it is not as serious as blaspheming. And arguing, what is the advice?... All together: *[along with the children]* make peace before the day is out. Okay?

Pope Francis: The third question: if there is something that frightens me or that I am afraid of. ... And when Sara asked me the question, she came over to me and said, "Guess what? I am afraid of witches! *[laughter]* But do witches exist?

Children: No – Yes...

Pope Francis: Really? And when you hear a woman say: “No, I will go to the ‘witch’ because I have a pain, she will do three or four things and make me better”... What is this called?

Children: A lie.

Pope Francis: A lie. Lying. Yes, and it's also something silly, because witches do not have any power. Okay? I said this after hearing “I'm afraid of witches”. What frightens me or makes me afraid... I am afraid when a person is bad: the wickedness of people. But when a person – because we all contain the seeds of badness, inside, because it is sin that leads you to this – but when a person chooses to be bad, that frightens me a lot. Because a bad person can do great harm. And I am afraid also when in a family, in a neighbourhood, in a workplace, in a parish, even in the Vatican, there is gossip; that frightens me. I will tell you something, listen well. Have you seen or heard on the television what terrorists do? They throw a bomb and then escape, that is what they do. One of the things they do. Gossip is like that: it is like throwing a bomb and running away. And gossip destroys, it destroys. It destroys a family, destroys a neighbourhood, destroys a parish, destroys everything. But most of all gossip destroys your heart. Because if your heart is capable of throwing a bomb, you are a terrorist, you cause harm in secret and your heart becomes corrupt. Never gossip! Do you agree or not?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Be afraid of gossip! Never! “But I would like to say something about this...”. Bite your tongue! Bite your tongue before saying it. “But it hurts!”. Yes, it will hurt, but do not harm another person! Do you understand? Truly, I am afraid of the capacity for destruction that gossip has; speaking badly of other people behind their backs, destroying them in secret. And this is horrible. This, yes, is what it is to be a witch: it is as if one were a witch. A terrorist. Okay?

Parish priest: The most beautiful moments of your life, Holy Father...

Pope Francis: Ah, there have been many. Many beautiful moments... A beautiful moment in my life was when as a child I used to go to the stadium with my father; my mother used to come too, at times, to see the match. In those times there were no problems at the stadium, and this was beautiful. On Sundays, after midday, after lunch, to go to the stadium and then return home ... It was beautiful. It was a beautiful moment. Another beautiful moment in life is...

Child: ...seeing yourself on television...

Pope Francis: No, I don't like the television, it makes me look ugly! *[laughter]* Have you seen how the television changes your face? It makes you a bit... not how you are... No, I prefer these things directly. What I don't like is wasting time. Another beautiful moment in life is meeting up with friends. Before coming to Rome, every two months I used to meet up with ten friends, schoolmates: we finished middle school together, we finished at the age of seventeen, and we continued to meet up, yes, each one with his family... It was beautiful. A beautiful moment. And another beautiful moment for me – I like it a lot – is when I can pray in silence, read the Word of God: this is good for me, I like it a lot. There are many beautiful moments, many of them ... I don't know... I can think of other beautiful moments to mention, but there are so many of them in my life ... And I thank the Lord. And you have beautiful moments too, don't you?

Children: Yes...

Pope Francis: Yes... You don't sound convinced ... Do you have beautiful moments or not?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Yes. One, for example...

Children: Today.

Pope Francis: Before moving on to the question from the girl ... The priest spoke about catechists. Raise your hands, catechists ... Thank you very much. What would the Church be without you? You are pillars in the life of a parish, in the life of a diocese. One cannot conceive of a diocese, a parish, without catechists. Ever since the first times, from the time after the Resurrection of Jesus, there were women who went to help their friends, and they were catechists. It is a beautiful vocation. It is a beautiful vocation. It is not easy to be a catechist, because the catechist must teach not only "things", but also attitudes, values, many things, how one lives. ... It is a difficult job. I thank you all, catechists, for your work. Many thanks. Thank you.

Parish priest: *[Recalling the question]* So much technology that enables us to communicate, but so much difficulty in dialogue ...

Pope Francis: This is good, because today we can communicate anywhere. But there is a lack of dialogue. Think of this ... Close your eyes, imagine this: at the table, mother, father, me, my brother, my sister, each one of us with his or her telephone, speaking ... Everyone speaks but they are speaking outside the circle: among themselves, they do not speak. They all communicate, it is true, by telephone, but they do not dialogue. This is the problem. This is the problem. The lack of dialogue. And the lack of listening. Yesterday I had a meeting, a nice group came to the Vatican – there were about four hundred people – from the association "Telefono Amico" – have you heard of them? It is an association that is available to listen: if you are sad, if you are depressed, or you have a problem or a doubt, you can call them and there is a person willing to listen to you. Listening is the first step of dialogue, and this I think is a problem that we have to solve. One of the worst afflictions of our time is the limited capacity for listening. As if we had blocked ears. Listening ... Yes, "I am communicating by telephone", but you don't listen to those who are near you, you do not dialogue, you are in communication with another but it is perhaps not true communication, there is no dialogue. I say one thing, you say another, but it is all virtual. We must reach concrete dialogue, and I tell you, young people. And how to we enter into dialogue? With the ear. By unblocking our ears. Ears open to hear what happens. For example: if I go to visit a sick person and I start speaking, "Don't worry, you'll get better soon, blah blah blah, goodbye, God bless you". How often do we do this? The poor patient remains there... but he needed someone to *listen!* When you go to visit a sick person, be silent. Give him a kiss, a caress, ask questions: "How are you?", and let him speak. He needs to get it off his chest, to complain, he even needs not to say anything but to feel that someone is looking and listening. The tongue in second place. What is in first place?

Children: The ear.

Pope Francis: I can't hear you...

Children: The ears!

Pope Francis: And the tongue, where is it? In second place, always. Listen. And from listening, dialogue. And also concrete dialogue, because what we do with the cellphone is virtual, it is liquid, it is not concrete. The concreteness of dialogue. This is very important. Have you understood?

Pope Francis: Good. Do this: learn how to ask questions like: "Oh, how are you?" – "Well..." – "What did you do yesterday?...". Ask a question and let the other person speak. And this is how dialogue begins. But the other must always speak first, and you, listen well. This is called "the apostolate of the ear". Do you understand? This is how dialogue works. At home we often say that priests must "speak with the daughter-in-law to let the mother-in-law hear"; and I say these things to children but so that grown-ups hear too! We all need to learn these things.

Parish priest: Holy Father, this is the book that contains all the questions, letters and drawings that the children and young people have done for you.

Pope Francis: Thank you for this, because I know that each one of you has done this with the heart, with love. Many thanks. Many thanks. And I thank the postmen who brought them: for me this has great value, because this is truly a bridge of dialogue, because dialogue is always a bridge. I thank you very much. Now, all together, I invite you to pray to our Mother in Heaven, Mary. “Hail Mary...”

[*Blessing*]

Greeting to the elderly and sick

Thank you for being here. I promise to pray for you. And I also want to say to you simply that sickness is a cross – you know this – but the cross is a seed of life, and bearing it well, one may give so much life to so many people that we do not know; and then, in Heaven, we will know. Thank you for bearing your sickness in this way.

I am close to you and I also ask you to pray for me, that the Lord give me spiritual life, that He make me good, that He make me a good priest for my service to others. I entrust myself to your prayers.

And now, together, let us pray to Our Lady. “Hail Mary...”

[*Blessing*]

See you soon, and pray for me! May the Lord bless you! Thank you!

Greeting to parents of newborns baptised in the last year

I thank you for being here: it is tiring to stand with children... Many thanks, many thanks! I ask you to pray for me, I am in need of this, and I will pray for you, so that these children grow well and are good people. Thank you for bringing life: this is great! It makes us resemble God, bringing life: it is this that He gives.

I now invite you to pray to Our Lady and then I will give my blessing to the families. “Hail Mary...”

[*Blessing*]

Many thanks! Pray for me. And let us go ahead!

Final greeting outside the Church

Good evening to you all!

Many thanks for your warm welcome. I see that you are a lively community, that you are active, and I am glad about this. Carry on with joy, always, without being disheartened. Always go ahead, with joy. I ask you to pray for me: I am in need, as I must do my work well, not just “good enough”; and to do it well, your prayer is necessary. And now, I invite you to pray to Our Lady all together, and I will give you my blessing: “Hail Mary...”

[*Blessing*]

Good evening to you all. May the Lord bless you! Goodbye!
