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Eucharistic Celebration presided at by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin for the 750th anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral of Monreale

The following is the homily pronounced by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin yesterday during the Eucharistic celebration held for the 750th anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral of Monreale.

Homily of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Eminence,
Dear Msgr. Pennisi,
Dear brothers in the Episcopate and in the Presbyterate,
Dear Deacons,
Distinguished civil and military authorities,
Dear brothers and sisters,

Today the archdiocese of Monreale celebrates the conclusion of the celebrations for the 750th anniversary of the solemn dedication of its splendid Cathedral, which took place on 25 April 1267, by the French Cardinal Rodolfo Grosparmi, bishop of Albano and papal legate of Pope Clement IV. Thank you, Your Excellency, for inviting me to participate in this moment of joy for the entire diocesan community, and I greet all those present with fraternal affection, also on behalf of Pope Francis, who has asked me to express his closeness and to transmit his blessing.

To gratitude to the Lord for this magnificent work, expression of faith and of the supreme artistic talent, we add another reason for joy, dear archbishop Pennisi, for the grateful remembrance of the fifth anniversary of the beginning of his pastoral ministry in this Church.

The scenario that opens up to the eye of the visitor to this Cathedral – even the most distracted or distant from the faith – inspires wonder at the harmonious and radiant concentration of perfect beauty. The splendour of gold and of figures directs attention to the *Pantocrator*, the omnipotent Christ in the act of blessing, in the apse,

immense, serene, glorious, which one never tires of contemplating. Many personalities were touched by this enchanting work, including the German theologian Romano Guardini, who was full of gratitude for the existence of this temple; Fr. David M. Turollo, who described Monreale as a “*wonderful treasure*”, and many others.

The Cathedral of Monreale evokes the same feelings experienced by the ambassadors of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, when, in 987, participating in a liturgy in a church in Constantinople, they reported to the king that they seemed to be transported between heaven and earth. In fact, the magnificence of the mosaics and of the whole construction is made more lively and vivifying by participating in liturgical action, when the Christian people united with their Pastor praise the Lord and renew His sacrifice on the Cross. The energies and skill that went into the construction of the temple are at the service of the action of prayer of the Christian community. The splendour of the place, which retraces in images the history of salvation, corresponds the daily miracle that makes us taste the Eucharist. The wonders created by art inspired by the Word of God become an ideal place to welcome the presence of the Lord who became food and drink of life for His people.

By participating with devotion in liturgical action in this temple and, in a very special way at Holy Mass, we can therefore experience a time and a place where humanity look out on eternity, touches the divine, and dialogues with it, receiving grace and consolation. We can enter a blessed land of boundaries, where God communicates with us, and we with Him. Thanks to the Eucharist that nurtures us, we form a true community that walks together and overcomes sterile selfishness and empty personalisms.

The splendour of the Cathedral brings us back to the faith that made it possible. Great Christian art is really, together with the witness of martyrdom and industrious charity, the most convincing proof of the truth of faith, of the fact that Christ is not a person relegated to the past, but is the living Risen One Who guides history. The Cathedral of Monreale invites us to take seriously the Christian Revelation, so that such a cascade of beauty may refer us to the source that inspired it, to generations of believers who knew, through stone and mosaic, how to manifest the inner joy of the disciple redeemed by Christ.

Owing to of the inestimable spiritual and ecclesial value as well as the historical-artistic value of your Cathedral, you are called – with the help of all – to make every effort to protect it and to maintain it reflecting light and beauty, so as to live up to your predecessors who raised it up. The Cathedral of Monreale is the pride of the city, of the archdiocese and of all Sicily; it is a treasure chest of faith that became stone and mosaic as a perennial testimony of the attachment of Sicilians to their Church and requires special care, attention and generosity.

The shining tesserae however postulate something more important, as the readings of today's Holy Mass help us to understand. They relate the church building to the people of God who gather in it. The external beauty of the temple is reflected in the beauty of the soul of every believer, sanctified by grace through baptism and the other sacraments, which make us members of the Body of Christ.

The magnificent material edifice corresponds to the spiritual one, which is built in love. Saint Peter reminds us in this regard that: “You... like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2: 5). The souls saved by Christ, inhabited by the Holy Spirit and on their way to the Kingdom of God, are the greatest masterpiece and the most beautiful cathedral to keep clean, bright and steadfast in good works.

The most important realities are therefore not the mosaic walls, but the people who recognize the Lord Jesus as a cornerstone and who recognize themselves as “living stones” of a spiritual building, which presents a beauty of holiness that stones can not express.

But we can not be living stones remaining in isolation, disconnected from the community that transmits us the gifts of the Lord. We do not live in the Church as independent and self-referential atoms, because each person is in a vital relationship with God Who created and redeemed Him and with the brothers. The Holy Spirit has gathered us together as one people, of which we are living members. It is therefore necessary to follow the breath and strive to create harmony, to be a choir, to make resound a melodious concert that multiplies the energies at the service of good.

We are helped to understand this fundamental dynamic by the passage from the Acts of the Apostles that we have now read, which presents the fundamental pillars of the early Church and, consequently, of every truly ecclesial community, expressed in perseverance, lived in harmony, and in the sharing of spiritual and material goods.

The first pillar is the teaching of the Apostles, direct witnesses of the Lord, which is to be internalized with serious and continuous commitment. The second pillar is communion, which indicates here the free sharing of material goods, making visible the spiritual union of believers, called to be “one heart and one soul” (*Acts 4: 32*). Communion guarantees that no-one lacks what is necessary to live, and that the poor can count on the solidarity and generosity of all. Whoever wants to be a disciple of the Lord cannot but help those who are in need.

As the Apostle John states: “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (*1 Jn 3: 18*). Christianity means, in imitation of Christ, radiating charity to all, and especially to the poor. Those who do not recognize this forget that Our Lord “though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (*2 Cor 8: 9*); we forget that the love for the neighbour we see is proof and verification of the love of God we do not see.

The third pillar is breaking the bread with brothers in the Eucharist, in joy and simplicity of heart. By exercising the virtue of humility, participating in the joys and sorrows of the community, making the liturgy the principal source of charity to resemble more and more the Eucharistic bread by which we are nourished, faith becomes light that spreads charity. As the Holy Father Francis recently affirmed in Molfetta: “*As if to say: one who is nourished by the Eucharist assimilates the Lord’s very mentality. He is Bread broken for us and those who receive it become in turn broken bread, which is not leavened with pride, but is given to others: they stop living for themselves, for success, to gain something or to become someone, but live for Jesus and like Jesus, that is, for others*” (Homily, 20 April 2018). The Eucharist – source and centre of the community – generates an active charity, in the footsteps of Christ, Who made himself charity of the Father towards us.

The assiduousness of the prayers in the temple, especially in some significant moments in the life of the Christian community, is the fourth pillar. In the gathering of the faithful, God works signs and wonders, strengthens and increases the community and disperses the disintegrating forces. The result is a beautiful and joyful life, which knows how to face human affairs, in their alternation between joys and sorrows, in the light of the Gospel, without escaping from reality, but with Paschal joy in the heart, which radiates an indestructible hope of life without end, with God, with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints.

The Gospel passage just proclaimed allows us to take another step forward. Jesus, addressing the Samaritan woman, tells her: “Woman ... believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth” (*Jn 4, 21, 23*). Jesus shifts attention well beyond the external place!

It is not decisive to worship God in a specific place. Instead, it is decisive to adore him in docility to the Holy Spirit, with a clear conscience, far from evil as redeemed by Christ. The splendour of the temple and of the liturgy is addressed to the souls so that they may in turn become splendid owing to the action of grace in them. In this way, prayer and adoration will become life and charity. They need – before the beauty of the temple of stones – the beauty of a docile heart, that loves the Lord and neighbour and makes room for God in every moment of existence.

On the day when Monreale rejoices at the memory of the dedication of its Cathedral and joyfully commemorates the entry into the archdiocese of its Pastor, we can repeat the words of the *Praeconium Paschale* that resounded in the glorious night of Christ’s Resurrection: “Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice, arrayed with the lightning of His glory, let this holy building shake with joy, filled with the mighty voices of the peoples!”

May the innumerable graces bestowed by the Lord be an occasion for deep gratitude and a reason for renewed commitment, on a personal and family level, as well as ecclesial and communitarian. May the Virgin Mother of God, to whom this temple is dedicated with the title of Nascent Mary, Saint Castrensis and all the saints of this

archdiocese, together with Saint Rosalia, Saint Agatha and the Blessed Father Giuseppe (Pino) Puglisi, be your powerful intercessors with the Father, so that He may give you every good, consolation and grace. So be it.
