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Homily of the Secretary of State at the Opening Mass of the Meeting of Papal Representatives in the Vatican

The following is the homily pronounced by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin in the Vatican Basilica this morning, on the occasion of the opening Mass of the Meeting of Papal Representatives, taking place in the Vatican from 12 to 15 June 2019:

Homily Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Dear brothers,

The readings of today's liturgy, which is proclaimed today in every Christian community, large and small, throughout the entire world, now resound for us in this, Saint Peter's Basilica.

They are extremely dense texts, which re-propose some doctrinal questions debated in the primitive Christian communities, leading back to the role recognized to the great mediator between God and Israel, Moses, and to the function performed by the Mosaic Law. Let us return to just some of the points that can directly enlighten our meeting, which begins with prayer around the altar of the Lord, and more generally, the service of Papal Representatives.

In the Gospel we hear that Jesus does not intend to abolish the Law, even though some of His gestures – for example some miracles performed in a provocative fashion on the Sabbath – could give rise to some doubts and some very lively reactions. Instead, Jesus is totally obedient to the Father and observes His Law, up to the slightest details (the “iota” and the “hyphen” are graphic details of minimal influence): because it is precisely in the smaller realities that the greatest loyalties are experienced! (cf. *Lk* 16: 10).

At the same time, however, He posits Himself as an authoritative interpreter of the commandments of Moses. Just think of the antitheses: “You have heard it was said, but I tell you”. Jesus does not reject, indeed,

sovereignly interprets the Mosaic legislation, intensifying its radicality.

Thus He places the whole question on the highest level of justice: that of love. In this regard, Paul will say: "Love is the fulfilment of the Law" (*Rom* 13.10). In this sense we could define Jesus as a "pious transgressor": "pious", as a faithful observer of the Mosaic Law, "transgressor" (from the Latin *transgredior*: "to overcome", "to go beyond"), as He exceeds it for the best, restoring it to its beating heart [1]: the commandment of love.

The Law has remained mummified, fixed, immobile, while expanding beyond measure. Jesus restores movement, lightness, reveals its possibilities. The Law is imprisoned in forms, which have reached disproportionate dimensions; it is a de-formed Law, which no longer manifests the intentions of God, His plan of love. Jesus frees it from these sclerotic casts, from this outer armour, makes its contradictions explode, makes evident its meaning, soul, and basic logic; reveals the consequences, the richness and the potential for the present. In short, He restores to it the dynamism that had remained frozen [2].

This observation allows us, among others, at least two relapses.

The first: we are constantly invited to monitor our relationship with the law. Here I mean above all canonical law, without excluding civil law.

On the one hand we must be the first custodians and observers: our work as Representatives of the Holy See must always be exemplary and our conduct crystal clear. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the Code of Canon Law itself teaches us that "*suprema lex salus animarum*" (can. 1752; cf. can. 747, § 2), in obedience to what Jesus claimed: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (*Mk* 2: 27).

Our service and all the legal systems present in the world are (or should be) addressed to the good of man and of every man: to respect for his rights, to building a more just society, to living together in peace. This, among other things, is the ambit of the diplomatic action of the Holy See. The law must always and only be at the service of humanity!

The second: if the pinnacle of the law is love, how lovingly our service must be endowed! The conditions in which we find ourselves may change: favourably in some countries or adversely in others. The action of the Church can be favoured in some places, or strongly opposed in others. But nothing or nobody can stop us from loving. A passionate love for Christ and for His Church, a generous love for men, for the peoples to whom we are sent and, above all, for the poor.

The reference to Moses, then, is found, in another form, also in the first reading. Paul, in fact, writing to the Corinthians, precisely establishes a comparison between the old and the new Covenant. Paul describes the first ministry as "glorious", but of a transitory glory, while he affirms that second is enveloped in a glory that is far more abundant and lasting. The idea behind this reasoning is subtle: there is no intent to diminish or dismiss the ministry of Moses, which in any case is "glorious". Rather, there is the desire in Paul to underline the supremacy of the ministry of the new Covenant entrusted to his person. He is fully aware of the greatness of his task: his apostolic service is none other than the ministry of the New Covenant, from which an "incomparable glory" emanates (*2 Cor* 3: 10), since it is realized by God himself in the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This conviction of Paul's has two direct implications: the immense loftiness of the *ministry* and, at the same time, the relativization of the *minister*. The mission entrusted to him is of divine origin, therefore he is invested with the authoritativeness of God Himself: "*Our competence comes from God*" (*2 Cor* 3: 5b). But, at the same time, the possibility of carrying out this task does not rest on the personal gifts or abilities of the Apostle: "*Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves*" (*2 Cor* 3: 5a). The glory that previously shone on the face of Moses does not now shine on Paul's!

Every ministry in the Church, including that of papal representation, does not enjoy its own glory, but must reflect

solely that of the New Covenant in Christ. Every day in the Holy Mass we celebrate the Eucharistic memorial with the very words of Paul: “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11: 25), constantly seeking to build relationships of esteem and fraternity with all, serving the “diplomacy” of the Gospel. The Apostle always says: God has committed to us “*the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us*” (2 Cor 5: 19-20).

Our *ministry* is very high, also covered with divine glory, but our *ministers* remain marked by poverty and limitations. One can be a papal representative only in the estimation of the task entrusted and, simultaneously, in sincere humility about one’s own person.

Paul then knows that his existence is totally involved in the ministry he carries out: the messenger is fully implicated in the message he brings. In fact, in the verses following our passage (which we will listen to tomorrow), he advocates a progressive transformation of ministers in the Gospel that they announce: “*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit*” (2 Cor 3: 18). The verb used (*metamorfoúmetha*) – we know – is the same as that presented in the episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Let us therefore be transformed by our task: if the messengers have to form a single body with the message they announce, the Papal Representatives are also called in some way to let themselves be transfigured by the announcement that they bear. In ancient times the ambassadors enjoyed an extraordinary status: as representatives, they made the person of the king himself present. If the ambassador was welcomed or, on the contrary, repelled, it was as if this gesture had been made directly to the represented monarch: there was something of the *sender* in the *envoy*. This is it. Not only must the pastoral style of the Holy Father be represented in us, which we represent and in the States in which we are accredited, but our hearts as pastors and bishops must increasingly identify themselves with the Gospel itself and with the New Covenant of Jesus.

This will make us men of great faith, of authentic humility, of passionate love for the Lord and for men, and of unconditional dedication to the Church, bride of Christ. These will be the most beautiful credentials that will make your ministry “glorious”!

Finally, I wish to entrust the conclusion of these thoughts to Paul himself: “*Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should*” (Eph 6: 19-20).

Therefore, let us pray, brothers, that our service of Pontifical Representatives may keep us “chained” to the Gospel of Jesus in an irreversible way, so that we too may become joyful and courageous “ambassadors in chains”, forever “prisoners” of the law of love.

Let us place ourselves in the hands and hearts of Mary, our Mother, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles. And so be it.

[1] See A. Martin, «Un “pio trasgressore”. Il rapporto di Gesù con la dimensione rituale-culturale del suo tempo», *CredereOggi* 4(2015), 40.

[2] A. Pronzato, *Il Vangelo in casa. L’“oggi della Parola di Dio”,* Gribaudi, Turin 1992, 183.
