



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis in Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius (4 to 10 September 2019) – Midday Prayer in the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites

Recitation of the Midday Prayer in the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites of Antananarivo

At 11.15 local time (10.15 in Rome) this morning, the Holy Father Francis visited the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites of Antananarivo, for the recitation of the midday prayer.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the Prior of the Monastery, Mother Mary Madeleine of the Annunciation, O.C.D., who awaited him at the foot of the stairs of the monastery chapel. He was awaited in the chapel by around a hundred contemplative sisters from various monasteries around the country. There were around seventy novices outside.

After the greeting address from the Prior of the Monastery, the Midday Prayer took place. At the end of the reading, after consigning to those present the text of the homily prepared for the occasion, the Pope addressed some extemporaneous remarks to the sisters who participated in the meeting.

At the end of the midday prayer, the Pope blessed the altar of the Cathedral of Morondava, situated in the adjacent choir, where the bishop and bishop of Morondava and the vicar general were present, and greeted some priests from the diocese.

Before leaving the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites in order to return to the nunciature, the Holy Father met with the surviving members of a family affected by the measles epidemic that hit Madagascar in recent months.

The following is the text of the homily prepared for the circumstance:

Homily of the Holy Father

Dear Mother Madeleine of the Annunciation,

Dearest Sisters,

Thank you, Mother, for your warm welcome and your kind words, which echo the sentiments of the contemplative nuns of all the different monasteries of this country. I thank every one of you, dear Sisters, for leaving the cloister for a moment in order to show your communion with me and with the life and mission of the entire Church, particularly the Church in Madagascar.

I am grateful for your presence, for your fidelity and for the radiant witness to Jesus Christ that you offer to the community. In this country, there may be poverty, but there is also great richness! For here we find a great treasure of natural, human and spiritual beauty. You too, dear Sisters, share in this beauty of Madagascar, its people and its Church, for it is the beauty of Christ that lights up your faces and your lives. Indeed, thanks to you, the Church in Madagascar is all the more beautiful in the Lord's eyes and in the eyes of the whole world as well.

The three Psalms of today's liturgy express the anguish of the Psalmist in a moment of trial and danger. Allow me to reflect on the first of them, taken from Psalm 119, the lengthiest of the Psalter, since it devotes eight verses to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. No doubt, its author was a contemplative, someone familiar with prolonged and beautiful experiences of prayer. In today's passage, the word "consume" appears several times and, significantly, in two senses.

The one who prays is "consumed" by the desire to encounter God. You yourselves are a living testimony to this insatiable desire present in the heart of all men and women. Amid the many proposals that claim to satisfy the human heart, but prove incapable of doing so, the contemplative life is the torch that leads to the one eternal fire, "the living flame of love that wounds tenderly" (Saint John of the Cross). You are a visible sign of "the goal toward which the entire ecclesial community journeys. For the Church 'advances down the paths of time with her eyes fixed on the future restoration of all things in Christ', thus announcing in advance the glory of heaven" (*Vultum Dei Quaerere*, 2).

We are constantly tempted to satisfy our desire for eternity with fleeting things. We find ourselves adrift on surging seas that only end up overwhelming our lives and our spirit. For this reason, "the world needs you every bit as much as a sailor on the high seas needs a beacon to guide him to a safe haven. Be beacons to those near to you and, above all, to those far away. Be torches to guide men and women along their journey through the dark night of time. Be sentinels of the morning (cf. *Is* 21:11-12), heralding the dawn (cf. *Lk* 1:78). By your transfigured life, and with simple words pondered in silence, show us the One who is the way, and the truth and the life (cf. *Jn* 14:6), the Lord who alone brings us fulfilment and bestows life in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Cry out to us, as Andrew did to Simon: 'We have found the Lord' (cf. *Jn* 1:40). Like Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, announce to us: 'I have seen the Lord!' (*Jn* 20:18)" (*ibid.*, 6).

The Psalm also speaks of another way of being "consumed". It speaks of the malicious, who seek to ruin the just. They persecute them, set traps for them, try to bring them down. A monastery is always a space where people consumed by the pain and sorrows of this world can come and find a hearing. May your monasteries, faithful to your charism of contemplation and your constitutions, also be places of welcome and listening, especially for those in greatest need. With us today are two mothers who have lost their children and who embody all the hurt and pain felt by our brothers and sisters on this island. Please be attentive to the pleas and the grief of those in your midst who, consumed by the experience of suffering, exploitation and discouragement, turn to you. Do not be like those who listen only to pass the time, to satisfy curiosity or to have something else to talk about.

You have a fundamental mission in this regard. The cloister sets you in the heart of God; his heart is thus always present in your midst. Your sensitivity to the heart of the Lord will enable you to hear him speaking in your brothers and sisters. The persons around you are often very poor, weak, troubled and hurting in a thousand ways; yet they are full of faith. In you, they instinctively recognize witnesses of God's presence and invaluable

sources of encouragement on the way to encountering him and receiving his help. However great the pain that consumes them, robbing them of joy and hope, and making them feel isolated and alone, you can be a pathway to that rock evoked in another passage from the Psalms: "Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (*Ps 61:1-2*).

Faith is the greatest treasure of the poor! How important it is that the faith be proclaimed to them, strengthened within them, and help them to live in hope. May the contemplation of God's mysteries, which finds expression in your liturgy and your times of prayer, enable you better to discover his active presence in each human situation, even the most troubling, and to be thankful that, in contemplation, God gives you the gift of intercession. Thanks to your prayer, you are like mothers, taking your children upon your shoulders and carrying them towards the promised land. Indeed, "our prayer will be all the more pleasing to God and more effective for our growth in holiness if, through intercession, we attempt to practise the twofold commandment that Jesus left us. Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams. Of those who commit themselves generously to intercessory prayer we can apply the words of Scripture: 'This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people' (*2 Mac 15:14*)" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 154).

Dear contemplative Sisters, what would the Church and those who live on the human peripheries of Madagascar be like without you? What would happen to all those who work in the forefront of evangelization, especially here, in very precarious, difficult and often dangerous conditions? They rely on your prayers and on the ever-renewed gift of your lives, an inestimable gift in the sight of God, one that makes you share in the mystery of the redemption of this land and of the beloved persons who dwell in it.

"For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke", says the Psalm (119:83), reminding us of how time passes when we experience this two-fold way of being consumed: by God and by the difficulties of the world. At times, almost imperceptibly, we can fall into "listlessness, mere routine, lack of enthusiasm and paralyzing lethargy" (*Vultum Dei Quaerere*, 11). It makes no difference how old you are, or how difficult it is to walk or to arrive on time for prayers... We are not wineskins drying next to the smoke, but logs burning until they are consumed in the fire which is Jesus. For he never fails us, he covers our every debt.

Thank you for this time we have spent together. I entrust myself to your prayers. To you I entrust all the intentions I carry in my heart during this visit to Madagascar. Let us pray together that the spirit of the Gospel may spring up in the hearts of all your people.
