



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE CAPUCHIN FRIARS MINOR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica, Altar of the Chair

Tuesday, 9 February 2016

[Multimedia]

In the Liturgy of the Word today, two attitudes are apparent. An attitude of majesty before God, expressed in the humility of King Solomon, and another attitude of pettiness, which Jesus' himself describes: shown by the doctors of the law who were fastidious but left the law aside in order to observe their little traditions.

Your tradition, that of the Capuchins, is a tradition of forgiveness, of giving forgiveness. There are many good confessors among you: it is because they feel they are sinners, like our Friar Christopher. They know they are great sinners, and before the majesty of God they pray continuously: "Hear, O Lord, and forgive" (cf. 1 Kings 8:30). And because they know how to pray this way, they know how to forgive. Instead, when someone forgets the need he has of forgiveness, slowly he forgets about God, he forgets to ask for forgiveness and does not know how to forgive. A humble man, one who feels he is a sinner, is a great forgiver in the confessional. The other type, like these doctors of the law who feel they are "the pure ones", "the masters", know only how to condemn.

I speak to you as a brother, and through you I would like to speak to all confessors, especially in this Year of Mercy: the confessional is for forgiveness. If you are not able to give absolution — I make this hypothesis — please, do not "lambaste". The person who comes, comes in search of comfort, forgiveness, peace of soul; let that person find a father who embraces them and says: "God loves you"; and lets each one feel it! I am sorry to say it, but many people — I think the majority of us have heard it — say: "I never go to confession because one time they asked me these questions, they did this to me...". Please....

However, you Capuchins have this special gift of the Lord: to forgive. I ask you: do not tire of

forgiving! I think of a person I knew in the other diocese, a man in a position of authority, who, once his term as custodian and provincial ended, at the age of 70, was sent to a shrine as a confessor. People queued up to see this man, everyone, everyone: priests, faithful, rich, poor, everyone! A great forgiver. He always found a way to forgive, or at least to leave that soul at peace with an embrace. I once went to visit him and he told me: “Listen, you are the bishop and you can answer me: I think I sin because I forgive too much, and I have this qualm...” — “And why?” — “I don’t know, but I always find a way to forgive...” — “What do you do, when you feel like this?” — “I go to the chapel, before the Tabernacle, and I say to the Lord: I’m sorry, Lord, forgive me, I think I forgave too much today. But Lord, it was you who set the bad example!”. That’s it. Be men of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of peace.

There are so many languages in life: the language of words, and there is also the language expressed by gestures. If people approach me, in the confessional, it is because they feel some burden, which they want to remove. Perhaps they do not know how to say it, but this is the gesture. If these people approach it is because they would like to change, not to do it any more, to change, to be another person, and they say it with the gesture of approaching. It is not necessary to ask questions: “Do you, you...?”. If a person comes it is because in his or her soul there is the wish not to do it any more. But so often people are unable, because they are conditioned by their psychology, by their life, by their situation.... *“Ad impossibilia nemo tenetur”*.

A big heart.... Forgiveness.... Forgiveness is a seed, it is God’s caress. Trust in God’s forgiveness. Do not fall into Pelagianism! “You must do this, this, this, this...”. You have the charism of confessors. Resume it, renew it always. And be great forgivers, because those who do not know how to forgive, like these doctors in the Gospel, become great condemners, always accusing.... Who is the great accuser in the Bible? The devil! Either you act as Jesus, who forgives by giving his life, prayer, long hours there, seated, like those two [St Leopold and St Pio]; or you play the role of the devil who condemns, accuses.... I don’t know, I cannot tell you anything else. Through you I say it to everyone, to all priests who hear confessions. And if they do not feel [they can exercise this ministry], that they be humble and say: “No, no, I celebrate Mass, I clean the floor, I do everything, but not confession, because I feel I am unable to do it well”. Ask the Lord for the grace, the grace that I ask for each one of you, for all of you, for all confessors, for myself as well.