The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
to CANADA
(24 - 30 JULY 2022)

VESPERS WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, DEACONS, CONSECRATED PERSONS, SEMINARIANS AND PASTORAL WORKERS IN THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME IN QUÉBEC

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

Basilica of Notre-Dame de Québec
Thursday, 28 July 2022

[Multimedia]

Dear brother Bishops, dear priests and deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and pastoral workers, good evening!

I thank Bishop Poisson for his words of welcome and I greet all of you, especially those who had to travel a long way to get here. The distances in your country are truly large! Thank you! I am happy to be here with you!

It is significant that we find ourselves in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Québec, the Cathedral of this particular Church and primatial see of Canada, whose first Bishop, Saint François de Laval, opened the Seminary in 1663 and devoted his entire ministry to the formation of priests. The brief reading that we have heard spoke to us about the "elders", that is the presbyters. Saint Peter urged us: "Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly" (*1 Pt* 5:2). Gathered here as the People of God, let us remember that Jesus is the Shepherd of our lives, who cares for us because he truly loves us. We, the Church's pastors, are asked to show that same generosity in tending the flock, in order to manifest Jesus' concern for everyone and his

compassion for the wounds of each.

Precisely because we are a sign of Christ, the Apostle Peter urges us to tend the flock, to guide it, not to let it go astray while busy about our own affairs. Care for it with devotion and tender love. Peter tells us to do this "willingly", not perforce, not as a duty, not as "professional" religious personnel, sacred functionaries, but zealously and with the heart of a shepherd. If we look to Christ, the Good Shepherd, before looking to ourselves, we will discover that we are ourselves "tended" with merciful love; we will feel the closeness of God. This is the source of the joy of ministry and above all the joy of faith. It is not about all the things that we can accomplish, but about knowing that God is ever close to us, that he loved us first, and that he accompanies us every day of our lives.

This, brothers and sisters, is our joy. Nor is it a cheap joy, like the one that the world sometimes proposes, dazzling us with fireworks. This joy is not about wealth, comfort and security. It does not even try to persuade us that life will always be good, without crosses and problems. Christian joy is about the experience of a peace that remains in our hearts, even when we are pelted by trials and afflictions, for then we know that we are not alone, but accompanied by a God who is not indifferent to our lot. When seas are rough: the storm is always on the surface but the depths remain calm and peaceful. That is also true of Christian joy: it is a free gift, the certainty of knowing that we are loved, sustained and embraced by Christ in every situation in life. Because he is the one who frees us from selfishness and sin, from the sadness of solitude, from inner emptiness and fear, and gives us a new look at life and history: "With Christ joy is constantly born anew" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1).

So let us ask ourselves a question: How are we doing when it comes to joy? Does our Church express the joy of the Gospel? Is there a faith in our communities that can attract by the joy it communicates?

If we want to go to the root of these questions, we need to reflect on what it is that, in today's world, threatens the joy of faith and thus risks diminishing it and compromising our lives as Christians. We can immediately think of *secularization*, which has greatly affected the style of life of contemporary men and women, relegating God, as it were, to the background. God seems to have disappeared from the horizon, and his word no longer seems a compass guiding our lives, our basic decisions, our human and social relationships. Yet we should be clear about one thing. When we consider the ambient culture, and its variety of languages and symbols, we must be careful not to fall prey to pessimism or resentment, passing immediately to negative judgments or a vain nostalgia. There are two possible views we can have towards the world in which we live: I would call one "the negative view", and the other "the discerning view".

The first, *the negative view*, is often born of a faith that feels under attack and thinks of it as a kind of "armour", defending us against the world. This view bitterly complains that "the world is evil; sin

reigns", and thus risks clothing itself in a "crusading spirit". We need to be careful, because this is not Christian; it is not, in fact, the way of God, who – as the Gospel reminds us – "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3:16). The Lord detests worldliness and has a positive view of the world. He blesses our life, speaks well of us and our situation, and makes himself incarnate in historical situations, not to condemn, but to give growth to the seed of the Kingdom in those places where darkness seems to triumph. If we are limited to a negative view, however, we will end up denying the incarnation: we will flee from reality, rather than making it incarnate in us. We will close in on ourselves, lament our losses, constantly complain and fall into gloom and pessimism, which never come from God. We are called, instead, to have a view similar to that of God, who discerns what is good and persistently seeks it, sees it and nurtures it. This is no naïve view, but a view that *discerns reality*.

In order to refine our discernment of the secularized world, let us draw inspiration from the words written by Saint Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an Apostolic Exhortation that remains highly relevant today. He understood *secularization* as "the effort, in itself just and legitimate and in no way incompatible with faith or religion" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 55) to discover the laws governing reality and human life implanted by the Creator. God does not want us to be slaves, but sons and daughters; he does not want to make decisions for us, or oppress us with a sacral power, exercised in a world governed by religious laws. No! He created us to be free, and he asks us to be mature and responsible persons in life and in society. Saint Paul VI distinguished secularization from *secularism*, a concept of life that totally separates a link with the Creator, so that God becomes "superfluous and an encumbrance", and generates subtle and diverse "new forms of atheism": "consumer society, the pursuit of pleasure set up as the supreme value, a desire for power and domination, and discrimination of every kind" (ibid). As Church, and above all as shepherds of God's People, as consecrated men and women, seminarians and pastoral workers, it is up to us to make these distinctions, to make this discernment. If we yield to the negative view and judge matters superficially, we risk sending the wrong message, as though the criticism of secularization masks on our part the nostalgia for a sacralized world, a bygone society in which the Church and her ministers had greater power and social relevance. And this is a mistaken way of seeing things.

Instead, as one of the great scholars of our time has observed, the real issue of secularization, for us Christians, should not be the diminished social relevance of the Church or the loss of material wealth and privileges. Rather, secularization demands that we reflect on the changes in society that have influenced the way in which people think about and organize their lives. If we consider this aspect of the question, we come to realize that what is in crisis is not the faith, but some of the forms and ways in which we present it. Consequently, secularization *represents a challenge for our pastoral imagination*, it is "an occasion for restructuring the spiritual life in new forms and for new ways of existing" (C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge 2007, 437). In this way, a discerning view, while acknowledging the difficulties we face in communicating the joy of the faith motivates us, at the same time, to develop a new passion for evangelization, to look for new languages and

forms of expression, to change certain pastoral priorities and to focus on the essentials.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Gospel needs to be proclaimed if we are to communicate the joy of faith to today's men and women. Yet this proclamation is not primarily a matter of words, but of a witness abounding with gratuitous love, for that is God's way with us. A proclamation that should take shape in a personal and ecclesial lifestyle that can rekindle a desire for the Lord, instil hope and radiate trust and credibility. Here, in a spirit of fraternity, allow me to suggest *three challenges* that can shape your prayer and pastoral service.

The first challenge is to *make Jesus known*. In the spiritual deserts of our time, created by secularism and indifference, we need to return to the initial proclamation. I repeat: it is necessary to return to the initial proclamation. We cannot presume to communicate the joy of faith by presenting secondary aspects to those who have not yet embraced the Lord in their lives, or by simply repeating certain practices or replicating older forms of pastoral work. We must find new ways to proclaim the heart of the Gospel to those who have not yet encountered Christ. This calls for a pastoral creativity capable of reaching people where they are living – not waiting for them to come – finding opportunities for listening, dialogue and encounter. We need to return to the simplicity and enthusiasm of the Acts of the Apostles, to the beauty of realizing that we are instruments of the Spirit's fruitfulness today. We need to return to Galilee. There is our encounter with the Risen Jesus: returning to Galilee is – if you permit me to use the expression – beginning anew after failure. Each one of us has our own "Galilee", the place of the initial proclamation. We need to rediscover this memory.

In order to proclaim the Gospel, however, we must also be credible. Here is the second challenge: *witness*. The Gospel is preached effectively when life itself speaks and reveals the freedom that sets others free, the compassion that asks for nothing in return, the mercy that silently speaks of Christ. The Church in Canada has set out on a new path, after being hurt and devastated by the evil perpetrated by some of its sons and daughters. I think in particular of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people, scandals that require firm action and an irreversible commitment. Together with you, I would like once more to ask forgiveness of all the victims. The pain and the shame we feel must become an occasion for conversion: never again! And thinking about the process of healing and reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others. Let us recover the missionary zeal of your first Bishop, Saint François de Laval, who railed against those who demeaned the indigenous people by inducing them to imbibe strong drink in order then to cheat them. Let us not allow any ideology to alienate or mislead the customs and ways of life of our peoples, as a means of subduing them or controlling them. The advances of humanity should be assimilated into their cultural identities with the keys of culture.

In order to defeat this culture of exclusion, we must begin with ourselves: bishops and priests, who should not feel themselves superior to our brothers and sisters in the People of God; consecrated men and women should live out fraternity and freedom through obedience in the community; seminarians should be ready to be docile and accessible servants; pastoral workers should not understand service as power. This is where we must start. You are key figures and builders of a different Church: humble, meek, merciful, which accompanies processes, labours decisively and serenely in the service of inculturation, and shows respect for each individual and for every cultural and religious difference. Let us offer this witness!

Finally, the third challenge: *fraternity*. Again, the first is to *make Jesus known* and the second is *witness*. The third is *fraternity*. The Church will be a credible witness to the Gospel the more its members embody communion, creating opportunities and situations that enable all those who approach the faith to encounter a welcoming community, one capable of listening, entering into dialogue and promoting quality relationships. That is what Saint François de Laval told the missionaries: “Often a word of bitterness, an impatient gesture, an irksome look will destroy in a moment what had taken a long time to accomplish” (*Instructions to Missionaries*, 1668).

We are talking about living in a Christian community that in this way becomes a school of humanity, where all can learn to love one another as brothers and sisters, ready to work together for the common good. Indeed, at the heart of the preaching of the Gospel is God’s love, which transforms us and makes us capable of communion with all and service to all. As a Canadian theologian has written: “The love that God gives us overflows into love... It is a love that prompts the Good Samaritan to stop and take care of the traveller attacked by thieves. It is a love that has no borders, that seeks the kingdom of God... and this kingdom is universal” (B. LONERGAN, ‘The Future of Christianity’, in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard F.J. Lonergan, S.J.*, London 1974, 154). The Church is called to embody this love without borders, in order to realize the dream that God has for humanity: for us to be brothers and sisters all. Let us ask ourselves: how are we doing when it comes to practical fraternity between us? Bishops among themselves and with their priests, priests among themselves and with the People of God. Are we brothers, or competitors split into parties? And how about our relationships with those who are not “one of our own”, with those who do not believe, with those who have different traditions and customs? This is the way: to build relationships of fraternity with everyone, with indigenous brothers and sisters, with every sister and brother we meet, because the presence of God is reflected in each of their faces.

These, brothers and sisters, are just a few of the challenges. Let us not forget that we can only meet them with the strength of the Spirit, whom we must always invoke in prayer. Let us not allow the spirit of secularism to enter our midst, thinking that we can create plans that work automatically, and by human effort alone, apart from God. It is idolatry to create plans without God. And, please, let us not close ourselves off by “looking back”, but press forward, with joy!

Let us put into practice these words that we now address to Saint François de Laval:

You were a man for others, who visited the sick,
clothed the poor, defended the dignity of original peoples,
supported the strenuous efforts of the missionaries,
ever ready to reach out to those worse off than yourself.
How many times were your projects frustrated!
Each time, however, you took them up again.
You understood that God does not build in stone,
and that in this land of discouragement,
there was a need for a builder of hope.

I thank you for everything you do, and I bless you from my heart. Please continue to pray for me.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana