



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO L'AQUILA

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

Forecourt of the Basilica of Saint Mary in Collemaggio
Sunday, 28 August 2022

[Multimedia]

The Saints are a fascinating explanation of the Gospel. Their lives are a privileged vantage point from which we can glimpse the good news that Jesus came to proclaim – namely, that God is our Father and each of us is loved by him. This is the heart of the Gospel, and Jesus is the proof of this Love – his incarnation, his face.

Today we are celebrating the Eucharist on a special day for this city and this Church: the Celestinian Forgiveness. Here, the relics of Pope Celestine V are preserved. This man seems to have completely accomplished what we heard in the First Reading: “The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord” (*Sir* 3:18). We erroneously remember Celestine V as “the one who made a great refusal”, according to the expression Dante used in his *Divine Comedy*. But Celestine V was not a man who said “no”, but a man who said “yes”.

In fact, there exists no other way to accomplish God’s will than to assume the strength of the humble, there is no other way. Precisely because they are such, the humble appear weak and as losers in the eyes of men and women, whereas in reality, they are the true conquerors because they are the ones who confide completely in the Lord and know his will. It is, in fact, “to the humble that God reveals his secrets, and by the humble he is glorified” (cf. *Sir* 3:19-20). In the spirit of the

world that is dominated by pride, the Word of God for today invites us to become humble and meek. Humility does not consist in belittling ourselves, but rather in that healthy realism that makes us recognize our potentials as well as our misery. Beginning with our misery, humility makes us take our gaze off ourselves in order to turn it toward God, to the One who can do everything and who even obtains for us what we would not succeed in obtaining on our own. "All things can be done for the one who believes" (*Mk 9:23*).

The strength of the humble is the Lord, not strategies, human means, the logic of this world, calculations. No, it is the Lord. In that sense, Celestine V was a courageous witness of the Gospel because there was no logic or power that was able to imprison or control him. In him, we admire a Church free from worldly logic, witnessing completely to that name of God which is Mercy. This is the very heart of the Gospel, for mercy is knowing that we are loved in our misery. They go together. Mercy cannot be understood without understanding one's own misery. Being believers does not mean drawing near to a dark and frightening God. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us of this: "For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them" (12:18-19). No. Dear brothers and sisters, we have drawn near to Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Mercy of the Father and the Love that saves. He is mercy, and it is only with his mercy that he can speak to our misery. If one of us thinks they can reach mercy another way than through their own misery, they have taken the wrong way. This is why it is important to understand one's own reality.

For centuries, L'Aquila has kept alive the gift that Pope Celestine V himself left it. That gift is the privilege of reminding everyone that with mercy, and with mercy alone, can the life of every man and every woman be lived with joy. Mercy is the experience of feeling welcomed, put back on our feet, strengthened, healed, encouraged. To be forgiven is to experience here and now that which comes closest to being resurrected. Forgiveness is the passage from death to life, from the experience of anguish and guilt to that of freedom and joy. May this church always be a place in which people can be reconciled and experience that Grace that puts us back on our feet and gives us another chance. Our God is the God of second chances – "How many times, Lord? One? Seven?" – "Seventy times seven". It is God who always gives you another chance. May it be a church of forgiveness, not once a year, but always, every day. For in this way peace is constructed, through forgiveness that is received and given.

Beginning with one's own misery and looking at that, trying to find out how to reach forgiveness, because even in one's own misery we will always find a light that is the way to go to the Lord. He gives us light in our misery. This morning, for example, I thought about this when, as we were arriving in L'Aquila and we could not land – thick fog, everything was dark, you couldn't land. The helicopter pilot was circling, circling, circling.... In the end, he saw a small hole and he went through there – he succeeded, a master-pilot. And I thought about this misery and how the same things happen with our own misery. How many times we look at who we are – nothing, less than

nothing – and we circle, circle... But at times, the Lord makes a small hole. Put yourself in there, they are the Lord's wounds! That is where mercy is, but it is in your misery. There is a hole in your misery that the Lord makes in order to enter into it. Mercy that comes into you, into my, into our misery.

Dear brothers and dear sisters, you have suffered much because of the earthquake. And as a population, you are trying to get back up and get back on your feet. But those who have suffered must be able to create a treasure out of their own suffering, they must understand that in the darkness they experienced they also received the gift of understanding the suffering of others. You can treasure the gift of mercy because you know what it means to lose everything, to see everything that had been constructed crumble, to leave everything that was dear to you, to feel the hole left by the absence of those whom you loved. You can treasure mercy because you have experienced mercy.

In their lives, everyone, even without living through an earthquake, can experience an "earthquake of the soul", so to speak, that puts us in contact with our own frailty, our own limitations, our own misery. In this experience, we can lose everything, but we can also learn true humility. In such a circumstance, we can allow life to make us bitter, or we can learn meekness. So, humility and meekness are the characteristics of those who have the mission of treasuring and witnessing to mercy. Yes, because mercy, when it comes to us and because we treasure it, we can also bear witness to this mercy. Mercy is a gift to me, for my misery, but this mercy must also be transmitted to others as a gift from the Lord.

There is, however, a wake-up call that tells us if we are going the wrong way. Today's Gospel reminds us of this (cf. *Lk* 14:1, 7-14). Jesus is invited to dinner, we heard, in the house of a Pharisee, and attentively observes how many are running to get the best seats at table. This gives him the cue to tell a parable that remains valid even for us today: "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Please, give your place to this person and you go back there!' And then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place" (vv. 8-9). Too many times people base their worth on the place they occupy in the world. A person is not the position he or she holds. A person is the freedom that he or she is capable of that is fully manifested when he or she occupies the last place, or when a place is reserved for that person on the Cross.

The Christian knows that his or her life is not a career after the manner of the world, but a career after the manner of Christ who said of himself that he had come to serve and not to be served (cf. *Mk* 10:45). Unless we understand that the revolution of the Gospel is contained in this type of freedom, we will continue to witness war, violence and injustice, which are nothing other than the external symptoms of a lack of interior freedom. Where there is no interior freedom, selfishness, individualism, personal interest, and oppression, and all these miseries, find their way in. And

misery takes control.

Brothers and sisters, may L'Aquila truly be the capital of forgiveness, the capital of peace and of reconciliation! May L'Aquila know how to offer everyone that transformation that Mary sings about in the *Magnificat*: "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate" (*Lk* 1:52), the transformation that Jesus reminded us of in today's Gospel, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (*Lk* 14:11). And precisely to Mary, whom you venerate under the title of *Salvation of the People of L'Aquila*, we wish to entrust the resolution to live according to the Gospel. May her maternal intercession obtain pardon and peace for the entire world. The awareness of one's own misery and the beauty of mercy.