



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PAPAL REPRESENTATIVES' DAYS

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 21 June 2013*

Dear Confreres,

These days in the Year of Faith are an opportunity the Lord has offered us to pray and reflect together in fraternal reunion. I thank Cardinal Bertone for the words he has addressed to me on behalf of you all and I would like to thank each one of you for your service, which helps me in my solicitude for all the Churches in the ministry of unity, which is central for the Successor of Peter. You represent me in the Churches scattered across the world and with the Governments, but seeing so many of you today also gives me a sense of the Church's catholicity and of her universal scope. A truly heartfelt "thank you"! "Important" is the word that springs to mind when it comes to your work, but it is a formal word. Your job is more than important, it is the work of making the Church, of constructing the Church; among the particular Churches and the universal Church, between the Bishops and the Bishop of Rome. You are not intermediaries; rather you are mediators, who create communion with your mediation. Some theologians who study ecclesiology speak of the local Church and say that the papal representatives and the presidents of bishops' conferences make a local Church which is not a divine institution. It is organizational but helps the Church to forge ahead. The most important work is that of mediation and in order to mediate it is necessary to know. Not merely in order to know the cards — it is very important to read cards and there are so many — but to know people. I therefore consider the personal relationship between the Bishop of Rome and you as essential. It is true, the Secretariat of State exists and helps us, but the latter point, the personal relationship, is important. And we must create it on both sides.

I have thought about this meeting and I offer you some simple thoughts on certain, I would say essential, aspects of your life as papal representatives. They are things I have pondered in my heart, thinking mainly of putting myself beside each one of you. At this meeting I should not like to

address to you merely formal words or words especially fitting for the circumstance. It would be bad for all of us, both for you and me. What I am saying now comes from inside me, I assure you, and is dear to my heart.

1. I would first like to emphasize that your life is nomadic. I have often thought about this: poor men! Every three or four years for the co-workers, a little longer for the Nuncios, you change your post, you move from one continent to another, from one country to another, from one Church situation to another, which often differ greatly. You are always carrying a suitcase. I wonder: what does this life tell us all? What is its spiritual meaning? I would say that it means going on a journey which is central in the life of faith, starting with Abraham, a man of faith who went on a journey. God asked him to leave his land, his securities, to set out, trusting in a promise, which he did not see but simply kept in his heart as a hope that God was offering him (cf. Gen 12:1-9). And to my mind this involves two elements.

The first is mortification, because going about carrying a suitcase really is a mortification, the sacrifice of stripping oneself of things, of friends, of ties, and of starting over and over again. And this is not easy; it means living in temporary circumstances, going out of yourselves, without having anywhere in which to put down roots, a permanent community, and yet loving the Church and the country you are called to serve.

A second aspect that this nomadic life, constantly on the move, entails is what is described to us in chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews. In listing examples of the fathers' faith, the author says that they saw the good things promised to them and they greeted them from afar — this is a beautiful image — after acknowledging that they were pilgrims on this earth (cf. 11:13). Such a life is of great merit, a life like yours, when it is lived with intense love and an active memory of your first call.

2. I would like to think briefly about the aspect of "seeing from afar", seeing the promises from afar, greeting them from afar. What did the Fathers of the Old Testament see in the distance? The good things promised by God. Each one of us can ask: what is my promise? What am I looking at? What do I seek in life? What our founding memory impels us to seek is the Lord. He is the promised good. This must never seem to us something to be taken for granted. On 25 April 1951, in a famous discourse, Mons. Montini, then Substitute of the Secretariat of State, recalled that the figure of the papal representative "is of someone truly aware that he is bringing Christ with him", as the precious good to communicate, to proclaim, and to represent. Property, the prospects of this world, end in disappointment, they feed the urge never to be satisfied; the Lord is the good that does not disappoint, the only one that does not disappoint. And this demands a detachment from ourselves that can only be achieved in a constant relationship with the Lord and in the unification of our life round Christ. And this is called "familiarity" with Jesus. Familiarity with Jesus Christ must be the daily nourishment of the papal representative because it is nourishment that originates in the memory of the first encounter with him and also constitutes the daily expression of faithfulness

to his call. Familiarity. Being on familiar terms with Jesus Christ in prayer, in the Eucharistic celebration, is never to be neglected in the service of charity.

3. For men of the Church too there is always a risk of giving in to what, borrowing the words of De Lubac, I call “spiritual worldliness”: succumbing to the spirit of the world that leads to acting for one’s own fulfilment rather than for the glory of God (cf. *Méditations sur l’Eglise*, 1952), to that sort of “bourgeoisie of spirit and life” which spurs us to lie back, to seek a comfortable, quiet life. I also reminded the students of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy that for Blessed John XXIII, service as a papal representative was one of the areas — and not a secondary one — in which his holiness was shaped, and I quoted several passages of the *Journal of a Soul* that referred specifically to this long stretch of his ministry. He said he understood increasingly that for his action to be effective he was constantly obliged to prune the vine of his life, cutting away all that was merely useless foliage to go straight to the essential, which is Christ and his Gospel, for otherwise he would risk turning a holy mission into a ridiculous one (cf. *Giornale dell’Anima*, [*Journal of a Soul*] Edizioni di San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo 2000, pp. 513-514). This “ridiculous” is a strong word but it is true: giving into the worldly spirit exposes especially us Pastors to ridicule. We may perhaps first receive some applause, but the very same people who seem to approve of us will later criticize us behind our backs. This is a common rule.

However, we are Pastors! And we must never forget it! Dear papal representatives, you are a presence of Christ, you are a priestly presence, a presence of pastors. Of course you will not teach a particular portion of the People of God which has been entrusted to you, you will not be at the helm of a local Church but you are pastors who serve the Church. Your role is to encourage, to be ministers of communion and it is also your duty, which is not always easy, to reprimand.

Always do everything with deep love! You are also pastors in your relations with civil authorities and your colleagues: always seek good, the good of all, the good of the Church and of every individual person. However, this pastoral work, as I said, should be carried out in familiarity with Jesus Christ in prayer, in the Eucharistic celebration, in charitable works: the Lord is present there. Yet, for your part, you must also act with professionalism and this will be, as it were, your — and here I am prompted to use a word — your cilice [hair shirt], your penance: always do everything with professionalism because this is how the Church wants you to act. Moreover when a papal representative does not do things with professionalism he also loses authority.

I would like to conclude with a word too on one of the important aspects, at least for the vast majority, of your service as papal representatives: collaboration with the bishops' provisions. You know the famous expression that indicates a basic criterion in the choice of the person who must govern: *si sanctus est oret pro nobis, si doctus est doceat nos, si prudens est regat nos* — if he is holy let him pray for us, if he is learned, let him teach us, if he is prudent let him govern us. In the delicate task of carrying out the investigation required prior to making episcopal appointments, be careful that the candidates are pastors close to the people: this is the first criterion. Pastors close

to the people. He is a great theologian, has a learned mind: Let him go to university where he will do such great good! Pastors! We need them! May they be fathers and brothers, may they be gentle, patient and merciful; may they love poverty, interior poverty, as freedom for the Lord, and exterior poverty, as well as simplicity and a modest lifestyle; may they not have the mindset of “princes”. Be careful that they are not ambitious, that they are not in quest of the episcopate. It is said that at an early audience Blessed John Paul II was asked by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops about the criterion for the selection of candidates for the episcopate, and the Pope said with his special voice: “the first criterion: *volentes nulumus*”. Those who seek the episcopate.... no, they won't do. And may they be bridegrooms of one Church, without being constantly on the lookout for another. May they be able to “watch over” the flock that will be entrusted to them, in other words to care for all that keeps it united; to “monitor” it, to be on the alert for dangers that threaten it, to nurture hope, so that hearts may be filled with sunshine and light, to sustain lovingly and patiently the plans God brings about among his People.

Let us think of St Joseph who watched over Mary and Jesus, of his care for the family God had entrusted to him, and of the attentive gaze with which he guided it to avoid the perils on the way. For this reason may pastors know how to be in front of the flock to show it the way, in the midst of the flock to keep it united, and behind the flock to prevent anyone from being left behind and because the flock itself has, so to speak, a “good nose” for finding the way. This is how the pastor must move!

Dear papal representatives these are only a few thoughts that come from my heart, I have given a lot of thought to writing this: I wrote it myself! I thought deeply and I prayed. These thoughts come from my heart, they are words with which I do not claim to say new things — no, none of the things I have said are new — but I ask you to reflect on them for the sake of the important and precious service you render to the entire Church.

Yours is a life that is frequently difficult, at times in places of conflict — as I know well: I have twice spoken to one of you recently. What pain, what suffering! A constant pilgrimage with no possibility of putting down roots in one place, in one culture, in one specific ecclesial situation. Yet it is a life that journeys on towards the promises and greets them from afar. A life on the way, but always with Jesus Christ who holds your hand. This is certain. He is holding your hand. Thank you again for this! We know that our permanence does not exist in things, in our own projects or ambitions, but rather in being true pastors who keep their gaze fixed on Christ. Once again, thank you! I ask you please to pray for me, because I am in need of it. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you. Many thanks.

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