



The Holy See

PRIVATE VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO CASERTA
FOR A MEETING WITH THE EVANGELICAL PASTOR GIOVANNI TRAETTINO

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Pentecostal Church of Reconciliation, Caserta
Monday, 28 July 2014

Good morning, Brothers and Sisters.

My brother, Pastor Giovanni, began speaking about the centre of our life: to be in the presence of Jesus. And then he said “to walk” in the presence of Jesus. And this was the first commandment that God gave to his people, to our father Abraham: “walk before me and be blameless”. And then the people walked: a few times in the presence of the Lord, many times not in the presence of the Lord. They chose idols, gods.... But the Lord has patience. He has patience with the people who walk. I do not understand a Christian standing still! A Christian who does not walk, I do not understand him! A Christian must walk! There are Christians who walk, but not in the presence of Jesus: it is important to pray for these brothers and sisters. Also for us, when at certain times we do not walk before Jesus, because we too are all sinners, everyone! If anyone is not a sinner, raise your hand.... To walk in the presence of Jesus.

Christians standing still: this harms, because what is still, what does not walk, spoils. Like still water, which is the first water to stagnate, water which doesn't flow.... There are Christians who confuse walking with “roaming”. They are not “walkers”, they are “wanderers” and they roam here and there through life. They are in the labyrinth, and there they wander, they wander.... They lack *parrhesia*, the boldness to go forward; they lack hope. Christians without hope roam through life; they aren't able to go forward. We are confident only when we walk in the presence of the Lord Jesus. He enlightens us, He gives us his Spirit to walk well.

I think of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. He was at peace, there with his sons; but at a certain point

famine came and he told his sons, his 11 sons, 10 of whom were guilty of treachery, of having sold their brother: “Go to Egypt, walk all the way there to buy food, because we have money but we have no food. Take the money and buy some there, where they say there is some”. And they began to walk: instead of finding food, they found a brother! This is wonderful!

When one walks in the presence of God, he is granted this brotherhood. When, on the other hand, we stop, we watch each other too closely, we are given another path... bad, bad! The path of gossip. And it begins: “But don’t you know?”; “No, no, I don’t know about you. I know about here and there...”; “I belong to Paul”; “I belong to Apollo”; “I belong to Peter”.... And thus they begin, from the first moment division begins in the Church. And it isn’t the Holy Spirit who creates division! He makes something which seems rather like it, but not division. It isn’t the Lord Jesus who creates division! He who creates division is actually the envious one, the king of envy, the father of envy: that sower of weeds, Satan. He barges in on the community and creates division, always. From the first moment, from the first moment of Christianity, there has been this temptation in the Christian community. “I am this; “I am that”; “No! I am the Church, you are the sect”.... And thus who acquires us is he, the father of division. Not the Lord Jesus, who prayed for unity (Jn 17), he prayed!

What does the Holy Spirit make? I said he makes something else, which one might think of as division, but it isn’t. The Holy Spirit creates “diversity” in the Church. The First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. He creates diversity! It’s true this diversity is so rich, so beautiful. But then, the same Holy Spirit creates unity, and this way the Church is one in diversity. And, to use a beautiful word of an Evangelist whom I love very much, a diversity “reconciled” by the Holy Spirit. He does both these things: he creates the diversity of charismata and then makes harmony of the charismata. For this the first theologians of the Church, the first fathers — I’m talking about the third or fourth century — said: “The Holy Spirit, He is harmony”, because He creates this harmonic unity in diversity.

We are in the epoch of globalization, and we think about what globalization is and what unity would be in the Church: perhaps a sphere, where all points are equidistant from the centre, all equal? No! This is uniformity. And the Holy Spirit doesn’t create uniformity! What shape can we find? Let us consider a prism: the prism is unity, but all its parts are different; each has its own peculiarity, its charisma. This is unity in diversity. It is on this path that we Christians do what we call by the theological name of ecumenism: we seek to ensure that this diversity may be more harmonized by the Holy Spirit and become unity; we try to walk before God and be blameless; we try to go and find the nourishment we need to find our brother. This is our path, this is our Christian beauty! I am referring to what my beloved brother said at the beginning.

Then he spoke of another thing, about the Incarnation of the Lord. John the Apostle is clear: “He who says that the Word did not become flesh, is not from God! He is from the devil”. He is not ours, he is the enemy! Because first there was heresy — let’s say the word among us — and this

is what the Apostle condemns: that the Word did not become flesh. No! The incarnation of the Word is at the foundation: it is Jesus Christ! God and man, Son of God and Son of man, true God and true man. And thus the first Christians understood and they must have really argued a great deal in order to maintain these truths: the Lord is God and man; the Lord Jesus is God made flesh. It is the mystery of Christ's flesh: one doesn't understand love for thy neighbour, one doesn't understand love for thy brother, if one doesn't understand this mystery of Incarnation. I love my brother because he too is Christ, is Christlike, is the flesh of Christ. I love the poor, the widow, the slave, those in prison.... Let's consider the "protocol" by which we will be judged: Matthew 25. I love all these people, because these people who suffer are the flesh of Christ, and it will do us good, who are on this path of unity, to touch the flesh of Christ. To go to the fringes, right where there are so many needs, or — let's say it better — there are so many needy, so many needy.... Even needy of God, who hunger — but not for bread, they have plenty of bread — for God! And go there, to tell this truth: Jesus Christ is the Lord and He saves you. But always go and touch the flesh of Christ! The Gospel cannot be preached purely intellectually: the Gospel is truth but it is also love and it is also beauty! And this is the joy of the Gospel! This is truly the joy of the Gospel.

On this path we have so often done the same thing Joseph's brothers did, when jealousy and envy have divided us. They first wanted to kill their brother — Reuben managed to save him — and then to sell him. Brother Giovanni also spoke about this sad story. That sad story in which the Gospel for some people was experienced as truth and they did not realize that behind this attitude there were many bad things, things not of the Lord, the ugly temptation of division. That sad story, in which the same thing that Joseph's brothers did was also done: that complaint, the laws of this people: "Go against racial purity...". And these laws were sanctioned by baptized people! Some of those who made this law and some of those who persecuted, denounced Pentecostal brothers for being "exuberant", almost "crazy", who tarnished the race, some were Catholics.... I am the Pastor of Catholics: I ask your forgiveness for this! I ask your forgiveness for those Catholic brothers and sisters who understood and were tempted by the devil and did the same thing as Joseph's brothers. I ask the Lord to give us the grace to recognize and to forgive.... Thank you!

Then Brother Giovanni said something that I completely share: the truth is an encounter, an encounter between people. Truth is not found in a laboratory, it is found in life, seeking Jesus in order to find it. But the greatest, most beautiful mystery is that when we find Jesus, we realize that He was seeking us first, that He found us first, because He came before us! For me, I like to say in Spanish that the Lord is *primerea* to us. It's a Spanish word: He precedes us and always awaits us. He is before us. And I believe that Isaiah or Jeremiah — I have doubt — says that the Lord comes like the almond flower, which is the first to blossom in spring. And the Lord awaits us! Is it Jeremiah? Yes! It is the first to blossom in spring, it is always first.

This encounter is beautiful. This encounter fills us with joy, with enthusiasm. Let's consider that encounter of the first disciples, Andrew and John. When the Baptist said: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". And they follow Jesus, staying with him all afternoon.

Then when they leave, when they return home, they say: “We heard a rabbi”.... No! “We have found the Messiah!”. They were exuberant. Some laughed.... Let’s consider the phrase: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”. They didn’t believe. But they encountered him! That encounter which transforms; from that encounter comes everything. This is the path of the holy Christian: to seek Jesus every day to encounter him, and to allow oneself every day to be sought by Jesus and to allow oneself to be encountered by Jesus.

We are on this path of unity, between brothers and sisters. Some may be shocked: “But the Pope went to the Evangelists!” He went to visit his brothers! Yes! Because — and what I speak is the truth — they first came to visit me in Buenos Aires. And there is a witness here: Jorge Himitian can tell the story of when they came, they made the approach.... And thus this friendship began, this closeness between the pastors of Buenos Aires, and here today. I thank you. I ask you to pray for me, I need it... that at least I won’t be so bad. Thank you!