



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO BISHOPS APPOINTED OVER THE PAST YEAR

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 September 2014*

Dear Brothers,

I am happy to meet with you personally now, because in fact I must say that in some way I already know you. Not long ago you were introduced to me by the Congregation for Bishops or that for the Eastern Churches. You are the fruit of the diligent work and the tireless prayer of the Church who, when she comes to choose her Pastors, seeks to actualize that whole night that the Lord spent on the mountain, in the presence of his Father, before calling those whom he wanted to be with Him and to be sent into the world.

Thus, I thank, in the persons of Their Eminences, Cardinal Ouellet and Cardinal Sandri, all those who contributed to your being selected as Bishops and who undertook to organize these days of meetings, assuredly fruitful, in which one can savour the joy of being Bishops not in isolation but in communion, of experiencing the co-responsibility of the episcopal ministry and solicitude for the whole of the Church of God.

I know your *curriculum* and I place great hope in your potential. Now I can finally match the first meeting on paper with your faces, and after having heard you spoken of, I can personally listen to the heart of each one of you and fix my gaze on each one of you in order to discern the many pastoral hopes that Christ and his Church place in you. It is beautiful to see the mystery of each of you reflected in your face and to be able to read what Christ has written there. It is consoling to know that God does not leave his Bride without Pastors according to His heart.

Dear Brothers, our meeting is taking place at the beginning of your episcopal journey. The astonishment at your being chosen has already passed; those initial fears — when your name was

pronounced by the Lord — have been overcome; and also the emotion experienced during your consecration is now being gradually stored in your memory and the weight of the responsibility has adjusted in some way to your actually fragile shoulders. The oil of the Spirit, poured on your head, is still fragrant and at the same time it seeps down upon the body of the Churches entrusted to you by the Lord. You have already felt that the Gospel, open upon your head, has become a home where one can live with the Word of God; and the ring on your right hand, which at times is too tight or at times risks slipping off, bears the power, however, to fuse your life to Christ and to his Bride.

In meeting you for the first time, I ask you mainly never to take for granted the mystery invested in you, not to lose wonder in the face of God's plan, nor the awe of walking with awareness in his presence and in the presence of the Church which is first of all his. In some part of you it is necessary to safeguard this gift received, ensure it never weakens, prevent it from becoming barren.

Now allow me to speak to you openly on several themes that are close to my heart. I feel the need to remind the Pastors of the Church of the inalienable bond between the steadfast presence of the Bishop and the growth of the flock. Every authentic reform of the Church of Christ begins with presence, that never-failing presence of Christ, but also from that of the Pastor who governs in the name of Christ. And this is not a pious recommendation. When the Pastor is remiss or unavailable, pastoral care and the salvation of souls are at stake (*De reformatione* Decree of the Council of Trent, IX). This was rightly said by the Council of Trent.

Indeed, through the Pastors whom Christ gives to the Church, He himself is loving his Bride and giving his life for her (cf. Eph 5:25-27). Love renders likeness in those who share it, thus all beauty in the Church comes from Christ, but it is also true that the glorified humanity of the Bridegroom did not disdain to take on our features. They say that after years of intense union of life and fidelity, in human couples too, the physical features of spouses gradually change and the two end up resembling one another.

You have been bound by a ring of fidelity to the Church which has been entrusted to you or which you have been called to serve. Love for the Bride of Christ gradually allows you to imprint your features onto her face and at the same time to carry within you her features. For this, intimacy, assiduity, steadfastness and patience are necessary.

There is no need for Bishops who are happy on the surface; one must dig deep in order to find what the Spirit continues to inspire in your Bride. Please, do not be Bishops with a set expiry date, who always want to change direction, like medicine that loses the capacity to cure, or as flavourless food that has to be thrown away because the food is no longer good for anything (cf. Mt 5:13). It is important not to block the healing power that flows from the soul of the gift you have received, and this defends you against the temptation to come and go with no destination,

because “*there is no favourable wind for those who do not know where to go*”. And we have learned where we are going: we are always going to Jesus. We are in search of “*where he is staying*”, because the response he gave at the beginning “*Come and see*” (Jn 1:39) is inexhaustible.

To live fully in your Churches it is necessary to always abide in Him and never to run from Him: to abide in his Word, in his Eucharist, doing “*his Father’s house*” (cf. Lk 2:49), and above all in his Cross. Do not pause briefly, but stay for a long time! As the light in the Tabernacle is inextinguishable in your majestic Cathedrals or humble Chapels, so may the Flock never fail to encounter the flame of the Risen One in your gaze. Thus, not extinguished or pessimistic Bishops, who, relying solely on themselves, therefore surrender to the darkness of the world or resign themselves to the apparent defeat of the good, now crying in vain that the fort is under attack. Your vocation is not to be guardians of a failed mass, but custodians of the *Evangelii Gaudium*, and therefore you cannot lack the one treasure which we truly have to give and which the world cannot give to itself: the joy of God’s love.

I ask you moreover not to be deluded by the temptation to exchange one flock for another. Love the people that God has given you, even when they have “*committed great sins*”. Do not tire of “*going up to the Lord*” to obtain forgiveness and a new beginning, even at the cost of seeing many of your unreal images of the divine face cancelled, or the dreams you have nurtured about the way to foster its communion with God (cf. Ex 32:30-31). May you learn the humble but compelling power of vicarious substitution, which is the sole root of redemption.

Even the mission, which has become so urgent, is born from that “*see where the Lord is staying and stay with him*” (cf. Jn 1:39). Only one who encounters, stays and abides acquires the allure and the authority to lead the world to Christ (cf. Jn 1:40-42). I am thinking of so many people to lead to Him, your priests, *in primis*. There are so many of them who no longer search for where He lives, or who live in other existential latitudes, some in slums. Others, forgotten by the episcopal fatherhood or perhaps tired of searching in vain, now live as if there were no longer fathers or they delude themselves that they need no fathers. I exhort you to cultivate within you, Fathers and Pastors, a quiet time in which to allow space for your priests: receive them, welcome them, listen to them, guide them. I would like you Bishops to be accessible not because of the media facilities you have, but because of the interior space that you offer to receive people and consider their actual needs, giving them the entirety and the breadth of the Church’s teaching, and not a catalogue of regrets. And let the welcome be for everyone without distinction, by offering the firmness of authority which helps to mature and the gentleness of fatherhood which generates. And, please, do not fall into temptation of squandering your freedom, by surrounding yourselves with a court, party or sycophants, because the Church and the world have the right to always find on the Bishop’s lips the Gospel which sets one free.

There is then the People of God entrusted to you. When, at the moment of your consecration, the

name of your Church was pronounced, the faces of those God was giving you reverberated. These People need your patience to care for them, to make them grow. I know well the extent to which our time has been rendered barren. It is necessary, then, to imitate Moses' patience in order to guide your people, without fear of dying in exile, but expending all your energy to the very end, not for you but to let those you are leading enter into God. Nothing is more important than introducing people to God! I especially entrust to you the young people and the elderly. The former because they are our wings, and the latter because they are our roots. Wings and roots without which we would not know what we are nor where we need to go.

As our meeting concludes, allow the Successor of Peter to scrutinize you from the height of the Mystery which irrevocably binds us. Today, seeing you in your different features, which reflect the limitless richness of the Church scattered throughout the earth, the Bishop of Rome embraces the Catholicity of the Church. It is not necessary to recall the singular and tragic situations of our day. Thus, I would like so much that a message of encouragement resound through you, in every one of your Churches. On returning to your homes, wherever they may be, please express the greeting and affection of the Pope and assure the people that they are always in his heart.

I see in you sentinels, capable of awakening your Churches, rising before dawn or in the middle of the night in order to rekindle faith, hope, charity, without allowing yourselves to be lulled or to conform to the nostalgic lament of a fruitful but now superseded past. Continue to dig into your sources, with the courage to remove the scales that have covered the beauty and the vigour of your pilgrim and missionary ancestors who planted the Church and created civilization.

I see in you men capable of cultivating and developing God's field, in which the young sowers await hands willing to water it daily in the expectation of an abundant harvest.

Lastly I see in you Pastors capable of reconstructing unity, of weaving networks, of mending, of overcoming fragmentation. May you dialogue respectfully with the great traditions in which you are immersed, without fear of becoming lost and without the need to defend your borders, because the Church's identity is defined by the love of Christ who knows no borders. While jealously safeguarding the passion for truth, do not expend energy on opposing and confronting, but on building and loving.

Thus, sentinels, men capable of tending God's field, shepherds who walk before, among and behind the flock, I bid you farewell, I embrace you, wishing you fruitfulness, patience, humility and much prayer. Thank you.