

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 170219c

Sunday 19.02.2017

The Pope visits a Roman parish and reiterates that vengeance is not part of the Christian vocabulary

The parish of Santa Maria Josefa del Cuore di Gesù, in Castelverde di Lunghezza, in the outskirts of Rome, received a visit from the Pope this afternoon. Upon arrival Francis met in the parish theatre hall the children studying the catechism and groups of young people, before then greeting the sick, the elderly, married couples who have recently baptised a child, and families assisted by Caritas in the parish. He then confessed four people.

Shortly after 5 p.m. the Holy Father presided at the celebration of Holy Mass in the parish church and, after the proclamation of the Gospel, pronounced an improvised homily in which he referred to the importance of prayer as a tool for overcoming the rancour and hatred at the root of all wars, from those within families to those between nations.

“In today’s readings there is a message I would define as unique”, he said. “In the first reading, the Word of the Lord tells us, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’. God the Father tells us this. And the Gospel finishes with that Word of Jesus: ‘You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’. This is the plan of life. Be holy, because He is holy; be perfect, because He is perfect”.

“And you may ask me, ‘But Father, what is the road to holiness? ... Jesus explains it very well in the Gospel ... with concrete things. First of all: “It was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil’. No vengeance. If I have rancour in my heart for something that someone has done to me and I want to avenge this, I drift from the path to holiness. ... ‘You have done this to me: you will pay!’ Is this Christian? No. ‘You will pay’ does not enter into the language of a Christian. No revenge, no rancour. ‘But that makes life impossible!’ ‘That neighbour gossips about me every day. I will gossip about her too’. No. What does the Lord say? Pray for her. ‘But I have to pray for her?’ ‘Yes, pray for her’. It is the path of forgiveness, of forgetting offences. ... Evil is conquered by goodness, sin with this generosity, this strength. Rancour is very ugly. We all know that it is not a small thing. The great wars – we see them on the news, in the newspapers, this massacre of people, of children – how much hatred! But it is the same hatred – the same! – that you have in your heart for that person or that relative, or your mother-in-law or that other person, the same. It is magnified, but it is the same. Rancour, the desire for vengeance: ‘You will pay!’, this is not Christian”.

“Be holy, because He is holy; be perfect, because He is perfect. ... For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’. He is good. God gives His goods to all. ‘But if she gossips about me, if he has done something bad to me...’. Forgive. In my heart. This is the road of holiness, and this leads us away from wars. If all men and women in the world were to learn this, there would not be wars. ... War begins here, in bitterness, in rancour, in the desire for revenge, for making people pay. But this destroys families, destroys friendships, destroys neighbourhoods, destroys so much. ... ‘And what must I do, Father, when I hear this?’ Jesus tells you, not I: ‘Love your enemies’ (Matthew, 5:44). ‘I have to love him?’ – Yes – ‘I can’t’ – Pray that you can. ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’. ‘Pray for those who wrong me?’ – Yes, so that they change their life, so that the Lord forgives them. This is the magnanimity of God, the magnanimous God, God with a big heart, Who forgives everything, Who is merciful. ‘It is true, Father, God is merciful’. And you? Are you merciful with those who have wronged you? Or do not wish good upon you? If He is merciful, if He is holy, if He is perfect, we must be merciful, holy and perfect like Him”.

“This is holiness. A man and a woman who do this deserve to be canonised: they become saints. Christian life is as simple as this. I suggest that you start with little things. We all have enemies; we all know that this or that person speaks badly of me. ... And we all know that this or that person hates me. We all know. And we start from a little. ‘But I know that he has slandered me, he has said bad things about me’. I suggest that you take a minute and say to God, ‘He or she is Your son, Your daughter: change his or her heart. Bless him, bless her’. This is called praying for those who do not wish us well, for our enemies. It can be done simply. Perhaps the rancour remains; perhaps it remains in us, but we are making the effort to take the road of this God Who is so good, merciful, holy and perfect, Who makes the sun rise on the bad and the good; He is good to all. We must be good to all. And pray for those who are not good, for all”.

“Do we pray for those who kill children in war? It is difficult, it is very far from us, but we must learn to do it. So that they convert. Do we pray for those people who are closer to us, and who hate and harm us? ‘Father, it is difficult, I would want to strangle them!’ Pray. Pray that the Lord may change their life. Prayer is an antidote to hatred, to war, to these wars that begin at home, that start in the neighbourhood, that begin in families... Think just of the wars in families for inheritances: how many families destroy themselves, hate each other over inheritances. Pray that there may be peace. And if I know that someone wishes harm to me, does not wish me well, I must pray especially for him. Prayer is potent, prayer conquers evil, prayer brings peace”.

“The Gospel, the Word of God today is simple. This advice: ‘Be holy, because He is holy; be perfect, because He is perfect’. And then, ‘Be perfect, because He is perfect’. And for this, ask for the grace not to remain in rancour, the grace to pray for your enemies, to pray for the people who do not wish us well, the grace of peace”.

“I ask you, please, to have this experience . every day, a prayer. ‘Ah, this person does not like me, Lord, I pray...’. Once a day. In this way we win, we take the road of holiness and perfection. May it be thus”, concluded the bishop of Rome.
