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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis in Colombia (6-11 September 2017) – Holy Mass at “Enrique Olaya Herrera” Airport, Medellín

Holy Mass at “Enrique Olaya Herrera” Airport, Medellín

Off-the-cuff address during liturgical greeting

Homily of the Holy Father

This morning, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the CATAM military airport of Bogotá. Upon arrival he greeted various people from General Motors near the steps to the aircraft. He then boarded an Avianca A321, destined for the airport of Rionegro.

Upon arrival at “José M. Córdoba” Airport, Pope Francis was received by the Bishop of Sonsón-Rionegro, the mayor of Rionegro and the commander of the air base. The Holy Father then transferred by helicopter to “Enrique Olaya Herrera” Airport in Medellín, where he was welcomed by the archbishop of Medellín, H.E. Msgr. Ricardo Tobón Restrepo, the governor and the mayor of the city.

After a tour among the faithful by pope mobile, the Holy Father entered the sacristy accompanied by a group of religious and consecrated persons. Then, at 10.35, he presided at the Eucharistic Celebration in liturgical memorial of Saint Peter Claver, Jesuit priest and apostle among deported black slaves. The image of the “Virgen del la Candelaria”, patroness of Medellín, was displayed on the altar.

Following the Holy Mass, the archbishop of Medellín, H.E. Msgr. Ricardo Tobón Restrepo, greeted the Holy Father. After the final blessing, Pope Francis transferred by car to the Conciliar Seminary.

The following are the words that the Holy Father pronounced off-the-cuff during the liturgical greeting of the Holy Mass and the text of his homily.

Off-the-cuff address during liturgical greeting

Dear brothers, I want to thank you for the hours you have spent here, even in the rain. Unfortunately, there was a significant delay in the trip and you had to wait even longer. Thank you for your patience, your perseverance and your courage. And as we are all sinners, let us ask for forgiveness for our sins.

Homily of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the Mass on Thursday in Bogotá, we heard Jesus calling his first disciples; the part of Luke's Gospel which opens with this passage, concludes with the call of the Twelve. What are the evangelists reminding us of between these two events? That this journey of following Jesus involved a great work of purification in his first followers. Some of the precepts, prohibitions and mandates made them feel secure; fulfilling certain practices and rites dispensed them from the uncomfortable question: "What would God like us to do?" The Lord Jesus tells them that their fulfilment involves following him, and that this journey will make them encounter lepers, paralytics and sinners. These realities demand much more than a formula, an established norm. The disciples learned that following Jesus presupposes other priorities, other considerations in order to serve God. For the Lord, as also for the first community, it is of the greatest importance that we who call ourselves disciples not cling to a certain style or to particular practices that cause us to be more like some Pharisees than like Jesus. Jesus' freedom contrasts with the lack of freedom seen in the doctors of the law of that time, who were paralyzed by a rigorous interpretation and practice of that law. Jesus does not live according to a superficially "correct" observance; he brings the law to its fullness. This is what he wants for us, to follow him in such a way as to go to what is essential, to be renewed, and to get involved. These are three attitudes that must form our lives as disciples.

Firstly, going to what is essential. This does not mean "breaking with everything", breaking with that which does not suit us, because Jesus did not come "to abolish the law, but to fulfil it" (*Mt 5:17*). Going to what is essential means to go deep, to what matters and has value for life. Jesus teaches that being in relationship with God cannot be a cold attachment to norms and laws, nor the observance of some outward actions that do not lead to a real change of life. Neither can our discipleship simply be motivated by custom because we have a baptismal certificate. Discipleship must begin with a living experience of God and his love. It is not something static, but a continuous moving forwards towards Christ; it is not simply the fidelity to making a doctrine explicit, but rather the experience of the Lord's living, kindly and active presence, an ongoing formation by listening to his word. And this word, we have heard, makes itself known to us in the concrete needs of our brothers and sisters: the hunger of those nearest to us in the text just proclaimed, or illness as Luke narrates afterwards.

Secondly, being renewed. As Jesus "shook" the doctors of the law to break them free of their rigidity, now also the Church is "shaken" by the Spirit in order to lay aside comforts and attachments. We should not be afraid of renewal. The Church always needs renewal – *Ecclesia semper renovanda*. She does not renew herself on her own whim, but rather does so "firm in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel" (*Col 1:23*). Renewal entails sacrifice and courage, not so that we can consider ourselves superior or flawless, but rather to respond better to the Lord's call. The Lord of the Sabbath, the reason for our commandments and prescriptions, invites us to reflect on regulations when our following him is at stake; when his open wounds and his cries of hunger and thirst for justice call out to us and demand new responses. In Colombia there are many situations where disciples must embrace Jesus' way of life, particularly love transformed into acts of non-violence, reconciliation and peace.

Thirdly, getting involved. Even if it may seem that you are getting yourself dirty or stained, get involved. Like David and those with him who entered the Temple because they were hungry and the disciples of Jesus who ate ears of grain in the field, so also today we are called upon to be brave, to have that evangelical courage which

springs from knowing that there are many who are hungry, who hunger for God - how many there are who hunger for God – who hunger for dignity, because they have been deprived. I ask myself if the hunger of God in so many might arise because we have deprived them through our attitudes. As Christians, help them to be satiated by God; do not impede them or prevent such an encounter. Brothers and Sisters, the Church is not a border station; she needs open doors, because the heart of her God is not only open, but also pierced by the love which has embodied pain. We cannot be Christians who continually put up “do not enter” signs, nor can we consider that this space is mine or yours alone, or that we can claim ownership of something that is absolutely not ours. The Church is not ours, brothers and sisters, she is God’s; he is the owner of the temple and the field; everyone has a place, everyone is invited to find here, and among us, his or her nourishment. Everyone. He who has prepared the nuptial feast for his Son, utters the command to invite everyone: the healthy and the sick, the good and the bad, everyone. We are simple servants (cf. *Col* 1:23) and we cannot prevent this encounter. On the contrary, Jesus tells us, as he told his disciples: “You give them something to eat” (*Mt* 14:16); this is our service. To eat the bread of God, to eat the love of God, to eat the bread which helps us to stay alive. Saint Peter Claver understood this well, he whom we celebrate today in the liturgy and whom I will venerate tomorrow in Cartagena. “Slave of the blacks forever” was the motto of his life, because he understood, as a disciple of Jesus, that he could not remain indifferent to the suffering of the most helpless and mistreated of his time, and that he had to do something to alleviate their suffering.

Brothers and sisters, the Church in Colombia is called to commit itself, with greater boldness, to forming missionary disciples, as the Bishops stated when they were gathered in Aparecida. Disciples who know how to see, judge and act, as stated in that Latin-American document born precisely here (cf. *Medellín*, 1968). Missionary disciples that know how to see, without hereditary short-sightedness; looking at reality with the eyes and heart of Jesus, and only then judging. Disciples who risk, who act, and who commit themselves.

I have come here precisely to confirm you in the faith and hope of the Gospel. Remain steadfast and free in Christ, steadfast and free in him, because all steadfastness in Christ grants us freedom, in such a way that you manifest him in everything you do; take up the path of Jesus with all your strength, know him, allow yourselves to be called and taught by him, seek him in prayer and allow yourselves to be sought by him in prayer, and proclaim him with the greatest joy possible.

Let us pray through the intercession of Our Mother, Our Lady of Candelaria, that she may accompany us on our path of discipleship, so that, giving our lives to Christ, we may always be missionaries who bring the light and joy of the Gospel to all people.
