



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
WITH THE EMINENT CARDINALS RESIDENT IN ROME
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF SAINT GEORGE

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Pauline Chapel

Tuesday, 23 April 2013

Photo Gallery

I thank His Eminence, the Cardinal Dean, for his words: Thank you, Your Eminence, many thanks.

I also thank those of you who came today. Thank you! Because I feel warmly welcomed by you. Thank you! I feel at home with you, and that pleases me.

Today's first reading makes me think that, at the very moment when persecution broke out, the Church's missionary nature also "broke out". These Christians went all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, and proclaimed the Word (cf. *Acts* 11:19). They had this apostolic fervor in their hearts; and so the faith spread! Some people from Cyprus and Cyrene, not these but others who had become Christians, came to Antioch and began to speak also to the Greeks (cf. *Acts* 11:20). This is yet another step. And so the Church moves forward. Who took this initiative of speaking to the Greeks, something unheard of, since they were preaching only to Jews? It was the Holy Spirit, the one who was pushing them on, on and on, unceasingly.

But back in Jerusalem, when somebody heard about this, he got a little nervous and they sent a *Apostolic Visitation*: they sent Barnabas (cf. *Acts* 11:22). Perhaps, with a touch of humor, we can say that this was the theological origin of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: this *Apostolic Visitation* of Barnabas. He took a look and saw that things were going well (cf. *Acts* 11:23). And in this way the Church is increasingly a Mother, a Mother of many, many children: she

becomes a Mother, ever more fully a Mother, a Mother who gives us faith, a Mother who gives us our identity. But Christian identity is not an identity card. Christian identity means being a member of the Church, since all these people belonged to the Church, to Mother Church, for apart from the Church it is not possible to find Jesus. The great Paul VI said: it is an absurd dichotomy to wish to live with Jesus but without the Church, to follow Jesus but without the Church, to love Jesus but without the Church (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16). And that Mother Church who gives us Jesus also gives us an identity which is not simply a rubber stamp: it is membership. Identity means membership, belonging. Belonging to the Church: this is beautiful!

The third idea which comes to my mind – the first was the outbreak of the Church's missionary nature, and second, the Church as Mother – is that, when Barnabas saw that crowd – the text says: "and a great many people were brought to the Lord" (*Acts* 11:24) – when he saw that crowd, he rejoiced. "When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced" (*Acts* 11:23). It is the special joy of the evangelizer. It is, as Paul VI said, "the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing" (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80). This joy begins with persecution, with great sadness, and ends in joy. And so the Church moves forward, as a Saint tells us, amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of the Lord (cf. Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18:51,2: PL 41, 614). This is the life of the Church. If we want to take the path of worldliness, bargaining with the world – as the Maccabeans were tempted to do back then – we will never have the consolation of the Lord. And if we seek consolation alone, it will be a superficial consolation, not the Lord's consolation, but a human consolation. The Church always advances between the cross and the resurrection, between persecutions and the consolations of the Lord. This is the path: those who take this path do not go wrong.

Today let us think about the missionary nature of the Church: these disciples who took the initiative to go forth, and those who had the courage to proclaim Jesus to the Greeks, something which at that time was almost scandalous (cf. *Acts* 11:19-20). Let us think of Mother Church, who is increasing, growing with new children to whom she gives the identity of faith, for one cannot believe in Jesus without the Church. Jesus himself says so in the Gospel: but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:26). Unless we are "Jesus' sheep", faith does not come; it is a faith which is watered down, insubstantial. And let us think of the consolation which Barnabas experienced, which was precisely the "delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing". Let us ask the Lord for this *parrhesia*, this apostolic fervour which impels us to move forward, as brothers and sisters, all of us: forward! Forward, bearing the name of Jesus in the bosom of holy Mother Church, as Saint Ignatius said, hierarchical and Catholic. Amen.