



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PRATO AND FLORENCE
(10 NOVEMBER 2015)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Artemio Franchi Municipal Stadium, Florence
Tuesday, 10 November 2015

[Multimedia]

In today's Gospel passage Jesus asks his disciples two questions. The first, "Who do *men* say that the son of man is?" (Mt 16:13), is a question that shows that Jesus' heart and gaze are open to everyone. Jesus is concerned with what the people think — not to please them, but to be able to communicate with them. Without knowing what the people think, a disciple would be isolated and judge people according to his or her own thoughts and convictions. Maintaining healthy contact with reality, with what the people experience, with their tears and their joys, is the only way to be able to help, to be able to teach and communicate with them. It is the only way to speak to the heart of people, by being in touch with their daily experience: such as work, family, health problems, traffic, school, health services and so forth.... It is the only way to open their hearts so as to listen to God. In reality, when God wanted to speak with us he became flesh. Disciples of Jesus must never forget from where they were chosen, namely, from among the people, and they must never give in to the temptation of taking on an attitude of detachment, as if what the people think and experience does not concern them or is not important to them.

This also applies to us. The fact that we are gathered today to celebrate Holy Mass in a sports stadium reminds us of it. The Church, like Jesus, lives in the midst of the people and for the people. For this reason the Church, throughout her history, has always borne within her the same question: *who is Jesus for the men and women of today?*

St Pope Leo the Great, originally from Tuscany, whose memorial we are celebrating today, also carried in his heart this question, this apostolic concern that everyone might come to know Jesus, and know him for what he truly is, not an image distorted by the philosophies and ideologies of the time.

This is why it is important to mature a *personal faith in him*. Here then is the second question that Jesus asks his disciples: “*But who do you say that I am?*” (Mt 16:15). Still today the question echoes in our conscience, as his disciples, and is decisive for our identity and our mission. Only if we recognize Jesus in his Truth, will we be able to see the truth in our human condition, and will we be able to make our contribution to the *full humanization of society*.

To safeguard and proclaim *steadfast faith in Jesus Christ is the heart of our Christian identity*, because in recognizing the mystery of the Son of God made man, we are able to comprehend *the mystery of God in the mystery of mankind*.

Simon answers Jesus’ question: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (v. 16). This response encompasses Peter’s entire mission and sums up what will become for the Church the *Petrine Ministry*, that is, to safeguard and proclaim the truth of the Faith; to defend and promote communion among all the Churches; to preserve the discipline of the Church. In this mission, Pope Leo was and still is an exemplary model, both in his luminous teaching, and in his gestures filled with the meekness, compassion and strength of God.

Today too, dear brothers and sisters, our joy is to share this faith and to respond together to the Lord Jesus: “*You are for us the Christ, the Son of the Living God*”. Our joy lies also in going against the tide and in moving away from the prevailing opinion that, now as at that time, is unable to see more than a prophet or teacher in Jesus. Our joy is recognizing the presence of God in him, God’s Emissary, the Son who came to make himself the instrument of salvation for humanity. This profession of faith that Simon Peter proclaims also holds true for us. It represents not only the foundation of our salvation but also *the path* through which it is fulfilled and *the goal* to which it is directed.

At the root of the mystery of salvation, in fact, lies the will of a *merciful God* who does not want to surrender to the misunderstandings, failures and misery of man, but gives himself *to the point of becoming a man himself* in order to meet each person in his or her actual condition. This merciful love of God is what Simon Peter recognizes in Jesus’ face. The same face that we are called to recognize in the forms in which the Lord has assured us of his presence in our midst: in his Word, which illuminates the darkness of our mind and of our heart; in his Sacraments, which regenerate us to new life from every death; in fraternal communion, which the Holy Spirit engenders among his disciples; in the boundless love placed at the generous and caring service of all; in the poor who remind us that Jesus wanted the supreme revelation of himself and of the Father to bear the image of the humbled, crucified Christ.

This *truth of the faith is a truth that scandalizes*, because it asks one to believe in Jesus, who, despite being in the form of God, emptied himself, humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant, even unto death on the cross, and for this God made him Lord of the Universe (cf. Phil 2:6-11). It is the truth that still today scandalizes those who cannot bear the mystery of God imprinted on the face of Christ. It is the truth that we cannot touch and embrace, as St Paul says, without entering *into the mystery of Jesus Christ*, and without making his feelings our own (cf. Phil 2:5). Only by beginning from the heart of Christ can we understand, profess and live his Truth.

In reality, the *communion between the divine and human, fully realized in Jesus, is our destination*, the culmination of human history according to the Father's design. It is the blessedness of the encounter between our weakness and his greatness, between our smallness and his mercy which will compensate every one of our limitations. This aim is not only the horizon that illuminates our path, but is also what attracts us with his gentle strength; it is what offers a foretaste and lives here and is built day after day with all the good that we sow around us. These are the seeds that help to create *a new, renewed humanity*, where no one is left on the margins or discarded; where those who serve are greatest; where the small and the poor are accepted and helped.

God and man are not two opposite extremes: they have always sought each other, because God recognizes in man his own image and man recognizes himself only by looking at God.

This is true wisdom, which the Book of Sirach indicates as the trait of the one who adheres to the sequela of the Lord. It is the wisdom of St Leo the Great, fruit of the convergence of various elements: word, intelligence, prayer, teaching, memory. But St Leo also reminds us that there can be no true wisdom except in the bond with Christ and in service to the Church. This is the path on which we intersect with humanity and we can encounter it with the spirit of the *Good Samaritan*. It is not in vain that *humanism*, which Florence has witnessed in its most creative moments, *always has the face of charity*. May this legacy bear the fruit of a new humanism for this city and for the whole of Italy.

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At the end of the Mass and before the final blessing, the Pope thanked those present with the following words:

I would like to thank you for this warm welcome, throughout the day; to thank the Cardinal Archbishop; to thank the Cardinals and Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and its President. All that you did for me today is a testimony. My thanks go to each of you.

I would especially like to thank the prison detainees who made this altar, where Jesus has come today. Thank you for doing this for Jesus.

To all of you, many thanks. And please, I ask you to pray for me.

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