



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 6th ASIAN YOUTH DAY
(13-18 AUGUST 2014)

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF ASIA

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Shrine of Haemi
Sunday, 17 August 2014

Video

I offer you a warm and fraternal greeting in the Lord as we gather together at this holy site where so many Christians gave their lives in fidelity to Christ. I have been told that some are nameless martyrs, since we do not know all their names: they are saints without a name. But this makes me think about the many, many holy Christians in our churches: children and young people, men, women, elderly persons... so very many of them! We do not know their names, but they are saints. It is good for us to think of these ordinary people who are persevering in their lives as Christians, and the Lord alone recognizes their sanctity. Their testimony of charity has brought blessings and graces not only to the Church in Korea but also beyond; may their prayers help us to be faithful shepherds of the souls entrusted to our care. I thank Cardinal Gracias for his kind words of welcome and for the work of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in fostering solidarity and promoting effective pastoral outreach in your local Churches.

On this vast continent which is home to a great variety of cultures, the Church is called to be versatile and creative in her witness to the Gospel through dialogue and openness to all. This is the challenge before you! Dialogue, in fact, is an essential part of the mission of the Church in Asia

(cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29). But in undertaking the path of dialogue with individuals and cultures, what should be our point of departure and our fundamental point of reference, which guides us to our destination? Surely it is our own identity, our identity as Christians. We cannot engage in real dialogue unless we are conscious of our own identity. We can't dialogue, we can't start dialoguing from nothing, from zero, from a foggy sense of who we are. Nor can there be authentic dialogue unless we are capable of opening our minds and hearts, in empathy and sincere receptivity, to those with whom we speak. In other words, an attentiveness in which the Holy Spirit is our guide. A clear sense of one's own identity and a capacity for empathy are thus the point of departure for all dialogue. If we are to speak freely, openly and fruitfully with others, we must be clear about who we are, what God has done for us, and what it is that he asks of us. And if our communication is not to be a monologue, there has to be openness of heart and mind to accepting individuals and cultures. Fearlessly, for fear is the enemy of this kind of openness.

The task of appropriating and expressing our identity does not always prove easy, however, since – being sinners – we will always be tempted by the spirit of the world, which shows itself in a variety of ways. I would like to point to three of these. One is the deceptive light of relativism, which obscures the splendor of truth and, shaking the earth beneath our feet, pulls us toward the shifting sands of confusion and despair. It is a temptation which nowadays also affects Christian communities, causing people to forget that in a world of rapid and disorienting change, “there is much that is unchanging, much that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10; cf. *Heb* 13:8). Here I am not speaking about relativism merely as a system of thought, but about that everyday practical relativism which almost imperceptibly saps our sense of identity.

A second way in which the world threatens the solidity of our Christian identity is superficiality, a tendency to toy with the latest fads, gadgets and distractions, rather than attending to the things that really matter (cf. *Phil* 1:10). In a culture which glorifies the ephemeral, and offers so many avenues of avoidance and escape, this can present a serious pastoral problem. For the ministers of the Church, it can also make itself felt in an enchantment with pastoral programs and theories, to the detriment of direct, fruitful encounter with our faithful, and others too, especially the young who need solid catechesis and sound spiritual guidance. Without a grounding in Christ, the truths by which we live our lives can gradually recede, the practice of the virtues can become formalistic, and dialogue can be reduced to a form of negotiation or an agreement to disagree. An agreement to disagree... so as not to make waves... This sort of superficiality does us great harm.

Then too, there is a third temptation: that of the apparent security to be found in hiding behind easy answers, ready formulas, rules and regulations. Jesus clashed with people who would hide behind laws, regulations and easy answers... He called them hypocrites. Faith by nature is not self-absorbed; it “goes out”. It seeks understanding; it gives rise to testimony; it generates mission. In this sense, faith enables us to be both fearless and unassuming in our witness of hope and love. Saint Peter tells us that we should be ever ready to respond to all who ask the reason for the

hope within us (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15). Our identity as Christians is ultimately seen in our quiet efforts to worship God alone, to love one another, to serve one another, and to show by our example not only what we believe, but also what we hope for, and the One in whom we put our trust (cf. *2 Tim* 1:12).

Once again, it is our living faith in Christ which is our deepest identity, our being rooted in the Lord. If we have this, everything else is secondary. It is from this deep identity – our being grounded in a living faith in Christ – it is from this profound reality that our dialogue begins, and this is what we are asked to share, sincerely, honestly and without pretence, in the dialogue of everyday life, in the dialogue of charity, and in those more formal opportunities which may present themselves. Because Christ is our life (cf. *Phil* 1:21), let us speak “from him and of him” readily and without hesitation or fear. The simplicity of his word becomes evident in the simplicity of our lives, in the simplicity of our communication, in the simplicity of our works of loving service to our brothers and sisters.

I would now touch on one further aspect of our Christian identity. It is fruitful. Because it is born of, and constantly nourished by, the grace of our dialogue with the Lord and the promptings of his Spirit, it bears a harvest of justice, goodness and peace. Let me ask you, then, about the fruits which it is bearing in your own lives and in the lives of the communities entrusted to your care. Does the Christian identity of your particular Churches shine forth in your programs of catechesis and youth ministry, in your service to the poor and those languishing on the margins of our prosperous societies, and in your efforts to nourish vocations to the priesthood and the religious life? Does it make itself felt in their fruitfulness? This is a question I raise, for each of you to think about.

Finally, together with a clear sense of our own Christian identity, authentic dialogue also demands a capacity for empathy. For dialogue to take place, there has to be this empathy. We are challenged to listen not only to the words which others speak, but to the unspoken communication of their experiences, their hopes and aspirations, their struggles and their deepest concerns. Such empathy must be the fruit of our spiritual insight and personal experience, which lead us to see others as brothers and sisters, and to “hear”, in and beyond their words and actions, what their hearts wish to communicate. In this sense, dialogue demands of us a truly contemplative spirit of openness and receptivity to the other. I cannot engage in dialogue if I am closed to others. Openness? Even more: acceptance! Come to my house, enter my heart. My heart welcomes you. It wants to hear you. This capacity for empathy enables a true human dialogue in which words, ideas and questions arise from an experience of fraternity and shared humanity. If we want to get to the theological basis of this, we have to go to the Father: he created us all; all of us are children of one Father. This capacity for empathy leads to a genuine encounter – we have to progress toward this culture of encounter – in which heart speaks to heart. We are enriched by the wisdom of the other and become open to travelling together the path to greater understanding, friendship and solidarity. “But, brother Pope, this is what we are doing, but perhaps we are converting no one

or very few people...” But you are doing it anyway: with your identity, you are hearing the other. What was the first commandment of God our Father to our father Abraham? “Walk in my presence and be blameless”. And so, with my identity and my empathy, my openness, I walk with the other. I don’t try to make him come over to me, I don’t proselytize. Pope Benedict told us clearly: “The Church does not grow by proselytizing, but by attracting”. In the meantime, let us walk in the Father’s presence, let us be blameless; let us practice this first commandment. That is where encounter, dialogue, will take place. With identity, with openness. It is a path to greater knowledge, friendship and solidarity. As Saint John Paul II rightly recognized, our commitment to dialogue is grounded in the very logic of the incarnation: in Jesus, God himself became one of us, shared in our life and spoke to us in our own language (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29). In this spirit of openness to others, I earnestly hope that those countries of your continent with whom the Holy See does not yet enjoy a full relationship, may not hesitate to further a dialogue for the benefit of all. I am not referring to political dialogue alone, but to fraternal dialogue... “But these Christians don’t come as conquerors, they don’t come to take away our identity: they bring us their own, but they want to walk with us”. And the Lord will grant his grace: sometimes he will move hearts and someone will ask for baptism, sometimes not. But always let us walk together. This is the heart of dialogue.

Dear brothers, I thank you for your warm and fraternal welcome. When we look out at the great Asian continent, with its vast expanses of land, its ancient cultures and traditions, we are aware that, in God’s plan, your Christian communities are indeed a *pusillus grex*, a small flock which nonetheless is charged to bring the light of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. A true mustard seed! A very small seed... May the Good Shepherd, who knows and loves each of his sheep, guide and strengthen your efforts to build up their unity with him and with all the members of his flock throughout the world. And now, together, let us entrust your Churches, and the continent of Asia, to Our Lady, so that as our Mother she may teach us what only a mother can teach: who you are, what your name is, and how you get along with others in life. Let us all pray to Our Lady.