



The Holy See

HOLY MASS CELEBRATED BY POPE FRANCIS
WITH THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA OF THE CATHOLIC COPTS,
HIS BEATITUDE ISAAC SIDRAK,
IN THE CHAPEL OF *DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ*

*Homily on the occasion of the public manifestation
of ecclesiastic communion between the Patriarch and the Successor of Peter*

Monday, 9 December 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 50, 13 December 2013)

*Your Beatitude,
Your Eminence,
Venerable Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

For the first time as Bishop of Rome, I have the joy of welcoming a new Patriarch who has come to fulfil a meaningful gesture of communion with the Successor of Peter. On accepting his canonical election, Your Beatitude immediately requested *ecclesiastica communio* with the “Church that presides in universal charity”. My venerable Predecessor granted it willingly, mindful of the bond with the Successor of Peter which the Church of Alexandria of the Catholic Copts has always preserved throughout its history. You are the expression of the preaching of St Mark the Evangelist: and this preaching is the legacy which he has left you as a good interpreter of the Apostle Peter.

In the First Reading, the prophet Isaiah (cf. 35:1-10) reawakened in our hearts the anticipation for the Lord’s glorious return. The encouragement to “those who are of a fearful heart” we hear

addressed to all those of your beloved land of Egypt who are experiencing insecurity and violence, sometimes on account of the Christian faith: “Be strong, fear not!”: these are the consoling words which are confirmed in fraternal solidarity. I am grateful to God for this meeting which gives me the opportunity to strengthen your hope and ours, because it is the same: “... the burning sand ... and the thirsty ground, in fact, shall become springs of water” and finally the “Holy Way”, the way of joy and happiness shall be opened “and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”. This is our hope, the common hope of our two Churches.

The Gospel (cf. Lk 5:17-26) presents Christ who triumphs over the paralysis of humanity. It portrays the power of divine mercy which forgives and wipes away every sin when it encounters authentic faith.

The paralysis of conscience is contagious. Through the complicity of the poverty of history and our sin, it can grow and enter into the social structures and communities to the point of obstructing entire peoples. However, Christ’s command — “Rise and walk!” can reverse the situation. Let us confidently pray that in the Holy Land and in the entire Middle East peace may rise again from the far too frequent and oftentimes dramatic interruptions of the peace process. May enmity and division cease. May peace negotiations which have often been paralyzed by conflicting and dark interests resume quickly. At long last may real guarantees of religious liberty be given for all people, together with the right for Christians to live peacefully where they were born, in the homeland which they have loved for 2,000 years, that they might contribute to the common good as they have always done. May the Lord Jesus, who with the Holy Family experienced the flight into Egypt and was a guest in your generous land, watch over the Egyptians who are searching for dignity and security along the world’s roads. And let us always go ahead, seeking the Lord, seeking new paths, new ways to draw close to the Lord. And were it necessary to open a hole in the roof to let everyone approach the Lord, may our charitable and creative imagination lead us to this: to find and create paths of encounter, paths of brotherhood, paths of peace.

For our part, we wish “to glorify God”, substituting fear with wonder: even today we can still see “wondrous things”. The wonder of the Incarnation of the Word and, therefore, of the absolute closeness of God to humanity, which places us within the mystery of Advent. May your great Father Athanasius, who is placed so close to the Chair of Peter in the Vatican Basilica, intercede for us, with St Mark and St Peter, and especially with the Immaculate and All Holy Mother of God. May they obtain that the Lord grant us the joy of the Gospel, given in abundance to disciples and to witnesses. Amen.