



The Holy See

THANKSGIVING MASS FOR THE CANONIZATION OF SAINT JOSÉ DE ANCHIETA,
PROFESSED PRIEST OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in Campo Marzio - Rome

Thursday, 24 April 2014

Video

In the Gospel passage we have just heard, the disciples could not believe the joy they felt, because they could not believe the cause of this joy. This is what the Gospel tells us. Let's set the scene: Jesus has risen, the disciples of Emmaus are speaking about their experience: Peter is also recounting what he had seen. Then the Lord himself appears in the room and says to them: "Peace be with you". Many feelings erupt in the hearts of the disciples: fear, surprise, doubt and, finally, joy. A joy so great that they "could not believe it". They are shocked, stunned, and Jesus, almost with a faint smile, asks them for something to eat and starts explaining the Scriptures, opening their minds so they are able to understand them. This is the moment of astonishment, of the encounter with Jesus Christ, where so much joy doesn't seem real; even more, to feel joy and happiness in that moment seems risky and we feel tempted to take shelter in skepticism, in "not exaggerating". It is easier to believe in a ghost than in the living Christ! It is easier to go to a magician who predicts the future, a fortune-teller than to have faith and hope in a victorious Christ, in a Christ who triumphed over death! It is easier to have an idea, an imagination, than docility to this Lord who rose from the dead than to go and learn what he has in store for one! Such a manner of relativization of the faith ends with distancing oneself from the encounter, with moving away from God's caress. It's as if we "distill" the reality of the encounter with Jesus Christ in a still of fear, in a still of excessive safety, of wishing to control the encounter ourselves. The disciples were afraid of this joy... and so are we.

The Reading from the Acts of the Apostles speaks of a paralyzed man. We heard only the second part of the story, but we all know about the transformation of this man, crippled from birth, lying at the door to the Temple asking for alms, without ever crossing the threshold, and how his eyes were fixed on the apostles, waiting for them to give him something. Peter and John could give him nothing that he asked for: neither gold nor silver. And he, who always waited at the door, now enters on his own two feet, jumping and praising God, praising his wonders. And his joy is contagious. This is what the Scripture tells us today: the people were completely astonished and amazed, and flocked to see this wonder. In the midst of that confusion, of that admiration, Peter proclaimed the message. The joy of the encounter with Jesus Christ, which we are so afraid of accepting, is contagious and he shouts the news: it is here the Church grows! The paralyzed man believes because “the Church does not grow from proselytizing, but from attraction”; this joy’s testimony that proclaims Jesus Christ attracts people. This witness born from the joy accepted and then transformed into proclamation. It is the founding joy. Without this joy, without this glee we cannot found a Church! We cannot establish a Christian community! It is an apostolic joy, that radiates and expands. Like Peter, I ask myself: “Am I able, like Peter, to sit next to my brother and slowly explain the gift of the Word that I have received, and infect him with my joy? Am I capable of arousing around me the enthusiasm of those who discover in us the miracle of a new life, which cannot be controlled, which demands docility because it draws us, it carries us; and is this new life born from the encounter with Christ?”.

St José de Anchieta also knew how to communicate what he had experienced with the Lord, what he had seen and heard from Him; what the Lord told him through his actions. He, along with Fr Nobrega, was the first Jesuit that Ignatius sent to America. A 19-year-old boy.... He had so much joy, so much joy that he founded a nation: he laid the cultural foundations of a nation in Jesus Christ. He hadn’t studied theology, he hadn’t studied philosophy, he was a boy! But he had felt Jesus Christ’s gaze resting on him, and he let him fill him with joy, and he chose the light. This was, and is, his holiness. He did not fear the joy.

St José de Anchieta composed a beautiful hymn to the Virgin Mary, inspired by the Canticle in Isaiah 52, in which he compared her to the herald who proclaims peace, proclaims the joy of the Good News. May she, who at sunrise on Sunday, was sleepless with hope and unafraid of joy, accompany us on our pilgrimage, calling everyone to get up, lay aside our paralysis, to enter together into the peace and joy that Jesus, the Risen Lord, promises us.