



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO KENYA, UGANDA AND THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
(25-30 NOVEMBER 2015)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Barthélémy Boganda Stadium, Bangui (Central African Republic)
Monday, 30 November 2015

[Multimedia]

We might be astonished, listening to this morning's first reading, by the enthusiasm and missionary drive of Saint Paul. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (*Rom* 10:15). These words inspire us to give thanks for the gift of the faith which we have received. They also inspire us to reflect with amazement on the great missionary effort which – not long ago – first brought the joy of the Gospel to this beloved land of Central Africa. It is good, especially in times of difficulty, trials and suffering, when the future is uncertain and we feel weary and apprehensive, to come together before the Lord. To come together, as we do today, to rejoice in his presence and in the new life and the salvation which he offers us. For he invites us to cross over to *another shore* (cf. *Lk* 8:22).

This *other shore* is, of course, eternal life, heaven, which awaits us. Looking towards the world to come has always been a source of strength for Christians, of the poor, of the least, on their earthly pilgrimage. Eternal life is not an illusion; it is not a flight from the world. It is a powerful reality which calls out to us and challenges us to persevere in faith and love.

But the more immediate *other shore*, which we are trying to reach, this salvation secured by the faith of which Saint Paul speaks, is a reality which even now is transforming our lives and the world around us. "Faith in the heart leads to justification" (*Rom* 10:10). Those who believe receive the very life of Christ, which enables them to love God and their brothers and sisters in a new way and to bring to birth a world renewed by love.

Let us thank the Lord for his presence and for the strength which he gives us in our daily lives, at those times when we experience physical and spiritual suffering, pain, and grief. Let us thank him for the acts of solidarity and generosity which he inspires in us, for the joy and love with which he fills our families and our communities, despite the suffering and violence we sometimes experience, and our fears for the future. Let us thank him for his gift of courage, which inspires us to forge bonds of friendship, to dialogue with those who are different than ourselves, to forgive those who have wronged us, and to work to build a more just and fraternal society in which no one is abandoned. In all these things, the Risen Christ takes us by the hand and guides us. I join you in thanking the Lord in his mercy for all the beautiful, generous and courageous things he has enabled you to accomplish in your families and communities during these eventful years in the life of your country.

Yet the fact is that we have not yet reached our destination. In a certain sense we are in midstream, needing the courage to decide, with renewed missionary zeal, to pass to the *other shore*. All the baptized need to continually break with the remnants of the old Adam, the man of sin, ever ready to rise up again at the prompting of the devil. How often this happens in our world and in these times of conflict, hate and war! How easy it is to be led into selfishness, distrust, violence, destructiveness, vengeance, indifference to and exploitation of those who are most vulnerable...

We know that our Christian communities, called to holiness, still have a long way to go. Certainly we need to beg the Lord's forgiveness for our all too frequent reluctance and hesitation in bearing witness to the Gospel. May the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which has just begun in your country, be an occasion to do so. Dear Central Africans, may you look to the future and, strengthened by the distance you have already come, resolutely determine to begin a new chapter in the Christian history of your country, to set out towards new horizons, to put out into the deep. The Apostle Andrew, with his brother Peter, did not hesitate to leave everything at Christ's call: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (*Mt 4:20*). Once again, we are amazed at the great enthusiasm of the Apostles. Christ drew them so closely to himself, that they felt able to do everything and to risk everything with him.

Each of us, in his or her heart, can ask the crucial question of where we stand with Jesus, asking what we have already accepted – or refused to accept – in responding to his call to follow him more closely. The cry of "those who bring good news" resounds all the more in our ears, precisely when times are difficult; that cry which "goes out through all the earth... to the ends of the earth" (*Rom 10:18*; cf. *Ps 19:4*). And it resounds here, today, in this land of Central Africa. It resounds in our hearts, our families, our parishes, wherever we live. It invites us to persevere in enthusiasm for mission, for that mission which needs new "bearers of good news", ever more numerous, generous, joyful and holy. We are all called to be, each of us, these messengers whom our brothers and sisters of every ethnic group, religion and culture, await, often without knowing it. For how can our brothers and sisters believe in Christ – Saint Paul asks – if the Word is neither

proclaimed nor heard?

We too, like the Apostles, need to be full of hope and enthusiasm for the future. The *other shore* is at hand, and Jesus is crossing the river with us. He is risen from the dead; henceforth the trials and sufferings which we experience are always opportunities opening up to a new future, provided we are willing to follow him. Christians of Central Africa, each of you is called to be, through perseverance in faith and missionary commitment, artisans of the human and spiritual renewal of your country. I underline, artisans of the human and spiritual renewal.

May the Virgin Mary, who by sharing in the Passion of her Son, now shares in his perfect joy, protect you and encourage you on this path of hope. Amen.