CELEBRATION OF PENANCE
COMMUNAL RECONCILIATION SERVICE
WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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[Multimedia]

"I want to see again" (*Mk* 10:51). This is what we ask of the Lord today. To see again, because our sins have made us lose sight of all that is good, and have robbed us of the beauty of our calling, leading us instead far away from our journey's end.

This Gospel passage has great symbolic value, because we all find ourselves in the same situation as Bartimaeus. His blindness led him to poverty and to living on the outskirts of the city, dependent on others for everything he needed. Sin also has this effect: it impoverishes and isolates us. It is a blindness of the spirit, which prevents us from seeing what is most important, from fixing our gaze on the love that gives us life. This blindness leads us little by little to dwell on what is superficial, until we are indifferent to others and to what is good. How many temptations have the power to cloud the heart's vision and to make it myopic! How easy and misguided it is to believe that life depends on what we have, on our successes and on the approval we receive; to believe that the economy is only for profit and consumption; that personal desires are more important than social responsibility! When we only look to ourselves, we become blind, lifeless and self-centred, devoid of joy and freedom. What an awful thing!

But Jesus is passing by; he is passing by, and he halts: the Gospel tells us that "he stopped" (v. 49). Our hearts race, because we realize that the Light is gazing upon us, that kindly Light which invites us to come out of our dark blindness. Jesus' closeness to us makes us see that when we are far from him there is something important missing from our lives. His presence makes us feel in need of salvation, and this begins the healing of our heart. Then, when our desire to be healed becomes more courageous, it leads to prayer, to crying out fervently and persistently for help, as

did Bartimaeus: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47).

Unfortunately, like the “many” in the Gospel, there is always someone who does not want to stop, who does not want to be bothered by someone else crying out in pain, preferring instead to silence and rebuke the person in need who is only a nuisance (cf. v. 48). There is the temptation to move on as if it were nothing, but then we would remain far from the Lord and we would also keep others away from Jesus. May we realize that we are all begging for God’s love, and not allow ourselves to miss the Lord as he passes by. “I fear the Lord passing by” said Saint Augustine. Fear that he will pass by and that I will let him pass by. Let us voice our truest desire: “[Jesus], let me receive my sight!” (v. 51). This Jubilee of Mercy is the favourable time to welcome God’s presence, to experience his love and to return to him with all our heart. Like Bartimaeus, let us cast off our cloak and rise to our feet (cf. v. 50): that is, let us cast aside all that prevents us from racing towards him, unafraid of leaving behind those things which make us feel safe and to which we are attached. Let us not remain sedentary, but let us get up and find our spiritual worth again, our dignity as loved sons and daughters who stand before the Lord so that we can be seen by him, forgiven and recreated. The word that perhaps touches our hearts today is the same word used to create man: “Rise up!” God has created us to stand up: “Rise up”.

Today more than ever, we Pastors are especially called to hear the cry, perhaps hidden, of all those who wish to encounter the Lord. We need to re-examine those behaviours of ours which at times do not help others to draw close to Jesus; the schedules and programmes which do not meet the real needs of those who may approach the confessional; human regulations, if they are more important than the desire for forgiveness; our own inflexibility which may keep others away from God’s tenderness. We must certainly not water down the demands of the Gospel, but we cannot risk frustrating the desire of the sinner to be reconciled with the Father. For what the Father awaits more than anything is for his sons and daughters to return home (cf. *Lk* 15:20-32).

May our words be those of the disciples who, echoing Jesus, said to Bartimaeus: “Take heart; rise, he is calling you” (*Mk* 10:49). We have been sent to inspire courage, to support and to lead others to Jesus. Our ministry is one of accompaniment, so that the encounter with the Lord may be personal and intimate, and the heart may open itself to the Saviour in honesty and without fear. May we not forget: it is God alone who is at work in every person. In the Gospel it is he who stops and speaks to the blind man; it is he who orders the man to be brought to him, and who listens to him and heals him. We have been chosen, as Pastors, to awaken the desire for conversion, to be instruments that facilitate this encounter, to stretch out our hand and to absolve, thus making his mercy visible and effective. May every man and woman who comes to confession find a father; a father who is waiting, a Father who forgives.

The conclusion of the Gospel story is significant: Bartimaeus “immediately received his sight and followed him on the way” (v. 52). When we draw near to Jesus, we too see once more the light which enables us to look to the future with confidence. We find anew the strength and the courage

to set out on the way. “Those who believe, see” (*Lumen Fidei*, 1) and they go forth in hope, because they know that the Lord is present, that he is sustaining and guiding them. Let us follow him, as faithful disciples, so that we can lead all those we encounter to experience the joy of his love. And after the Father’s embrace, the Father’s forgiveness, let us celebrate in our hearts! For the Lord himself celebrates!

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