



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF "SANTA MARIA A SETTEVILLE"

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Sunday, 15 January 2017

[Multimedia]

The Gospel presents us John at the moment in which he bears witness to Jesus. Seeing Jesus come toward him, he says: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me'" (Jn 1:29-30). This is the Messiah. He bears witness. And several disciples, upon hearing this testimony — John's disciples — follow Jesus: they go after Him and are happy: "We have found the Messiah" (Jn 1:41). They felt Jesus' presence. But why did they encounter Jesus? Because there was a witness; because there was a man who bore witness to Jesus.

This is how it happens in our life. There are many Christians who profess that Jesus is God; there are many priests who profess that Jesus is God, many bishops.... But does everyone bear witness to Jesus? Or is being Christian ... a way of life like another, like being the fan of a team? 'Yes, I'm a Christian...'. Or having a philosophy: 'I follow these commandments, I'm a Christian, I must do this...'. Being Christian, first of all, is bearing witness to Jesus. The first thing. This is what the Apostles did: the Apostles bore witness to Jesus, and because of this, Christianity spread throughout the world. Witness and martyrdom: the same thing. One bears witness in small ways, and some reach greatness, giving their life in martyrdom, like the Apostles. But the Apostles did not take a course to become witnesses to Jesus; they did not study, they did not go to university. They felt the Spirit within and followed the inspiration of the Spirit; they were faithful to this. But they were sinners, all! The Twelve were sinners. 'No, Father, only Judas!'. No, poor man.... We do not know what happened after his death, because there is also God's mercy at that moment. But all were sinners, every one. Envious, they had jealousy among them: 'No, I must have the first place, and you the second'; and two of them spoke to their mother so she went to ask Jesus to give the first place to her sons.... They were like this, with all their sins. They were also traitors, because when Jesus was captured, they all fled, full of fear; they hid: they were frightened. And

Peter, who knew he was in charge, felt the need to come a little closer to see what was happening; and when the priest's housekeeper said: 'You too were...', he said: 'No, no, no!'. He denied Jesus; he betrayed Jesus. Peter! The first Pope. He betrayed Jesus. These are witnesses! Yes, because they were witnesses of the salvation that Jesus brings, and everyone converted for this salvation, they let themselves be saved. It is beautiful when, on the riverbank, Jesus performed that miracle [the miraculous catch of fish] and Peter says: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8). Being a witness does not mean being a saint, but being a poor man, a poor woman who says: 'Yes, I am a sinner, but Jesus is the Lord and I bear witness to him, and I seek to do good every day, to correct my life, to take the right path'.

I would only like to leave you a message. We all understand this, what I have said: sinful witnesses. But, reading the Gospel, I do not find one [certain type of] sin in the Apostles. There were some brutes, who wanted to burn down a village that had not welcomed them.... They had many sins: traitors, cowards.... But I do not find one [in particular]: they were not gossipmongers; they did not speak ill of others, they did not speak badly of one another. In this they were good. They did not 'rip off others'. I think of our communities: how many times this sin of 'flaying one another', of disparaging, of believing oneself superior to another and secretly speaking ill! In the Gospel, they did not do this. They did terrible things; they betrayed the Lord, but did not do this. Even in one parish, in one community who knows where ... this one cheated, this one did that..., but then they confess, they convert.... We are all sinners. But a community where there are gossipmongers is a community that is incapable of bearing witness.

I will say only this: do you want a perfect parish? No gossiping. None. If you have something against another, go and say it to his face, or tell the parish priest; but not among yourselves. This is a sign that the Holy Spirit is in a parish. Other sins, we all have them. There is a collection of sins: one takes this, one takes that, but we are all sinners. But like a woodworm, what destroys a community is gossip, behind others' backs.

I would like this community, on this day of my visit, to make the resolution not to gossip. When you have the desire to gossip, bite your tongue: it will swell, but it will do you so much good, because in the Gospel these witnesses to Jesus — sinners: they even betrayed the Lord! — they never gossiped about one another. This is beautiful. A parish where there is no gossip is a perfect parish; it is a parish of sinners, yes, but of witnesses. This is the witness that the first Christians bore: 'As they love each other, as they love each other!'. Love each other at least in this. May the Lord give you this gift, this grace: never, never speak ill of one another. Thank you.