



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS
TO ALESSANO (LECCE) AND TO MOLFETTA (BARI),
ON THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF H. E. MSGR. TONINO BELLO

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

Port of Molfetta (Bari)

Friday, 20 April 2018

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The Readings that we have heard present two elements central to Christian life: Bread and the Word.

Bread. Bread is essential food for living and in the Gospel Jesus offers himself to us as the *Bread of Life*, as if to tell us: ‘you cannot do without me’. And he uses powerful expressions: ‘eat my flesh and drink my blood’ (cf. Jn 6:53). What does it mean? That for our life it is essential to enter into a vital, personal relationship with him. Flesh and blood. This is the Eucharist: it is not a fine rite, but the most intimate, most concrete, most surprising communion with God that one can imagine: a communion of love so real that it takes the form of food. Christian life begins anew each time from here, from this Table, where God satiates us with love. Without him, the Bread of Life, all effort in the Church is in vain, as Fr Tonino Bello recalled: “Works of charity are not enough, without charity of works. If there is no love from which works begin, if the source is lacking, if we lack the point of departure which is the Eucharist, every pastoral task results in a maelstrom”.^[1]

In the Gospel Jesus adds: “he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). As if to say: one who is nourished by the Eucharist assimilates the Lord’s very mentality. He is *Bread broken* for us

and those who receive it become in turn broken bread, which is not leavened with pride, but is given to others: they stop living for themselves, for success, to gain something or to become someone, but live for Jesus and like Jesus, that is, for others. *Living for* is the mark of one who eats this Bread, the 'trademark' of a Christian. *Living for*. It could be displayed as a notice outside every church: 'After Mass, we no longer live for ourselves, but for others'. It would be nice if this notice were on the doors of the churches in this diocese of Fr Tonino Bello, so that it could be read by everyone: 'After Mass, we no longer live for ourselves, but for others'. Fr Tonino lived this way: among you he was a Bishop-servant, a Pastor who lived as one of you; who, before the Tabernacle learned to make himself nourishment for the people. He dreamt of a Church hungry for Jesus and intolerant of all worldliness; a Church that "can perceive the Body of Christ in the wearisome tabernacles of misery, suffering, solitude".[2] Because, he said, "the Eucharist does not tolerate idleness", and by not getting up from the Table it remains "an incomplete sacrament".[3] We can ask ourselves: is this Sacrament fulfilled in me? More concretely: do I just like to be served at the Lord's Table or do I get up to serve like the Lord? In life, do I give what I receive at Mass? And as a Church let us ask ourselves: after receiving Communion many times, have we become people of communion?

The Bread of Life, the broken Bread is indeed also *Bread of Peace*. Fr Tonino maintained that "peace does not come when one just takes his bread and goes and eats it on his own.... Peace is something more: it is sharing". It is "eating bread together with others, without distinction, sitting down at the table with different people", where "the other is a face to discover, to contemplate, to caress".[4] Because conflicts and all wars "are rooted in the gradual fading of faces".[5] And we who share this Bread of unity and of peace are called to love every face; to mend every tear; to be, always and everywhere, builders of peace.

Along with Bread, *the Word*. The Gospel records harsh disputes over Jesus' words: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52). There is an air of defeatism in these words. So many of our words resemble these: how can the Gospel solve the world's problems? What use is it to do good amid so much evil? And thus we fall into the error of those people, paralyzed in disputation over Jesus' words, rather than ready to accept the change of life that he asks for. They did not understand that the Word of Jesus is for journeying in life, not for sitting down to talk about what does or does not work. Fr Tonino, precisely in the Time of Easter, hoped to embrace this newness of life, by actually passing from words to deeds. Therefore, he made a heartfelt appeal to those who lacked the courage to change: "the specialists of perplexity. The pedants who sum up the pros and cons. Those who cautiously calculate to the very last before acting".[6] We should not respond to Jesus according to calculations and current convenience; let us respond with the 'yes' of our whole life. He does not seek our reflection but our conversion. He aims at the heart.

The Word of God itself suggests it. In the First Reading, the Risen Jesus addresses Saul and does not offer subtle reasoning, but asks him to bet his life on it. He tells him: "Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9:6). First and foremost: "Rise". The first thing to

avoid is remaining on the ground, giving in to events, being gripped by fear. How often Fr Tonino repeated: 'Stand up!', because "it is not licit to be before the Risen One unless you are on your feet".^[7] Always standing, looking on high, because an apostle of Jesus cannot get by on little satisfactions.

The Lord then says to Saul: "enter the city". He also says to each of us: 'Go, do not remain locked in your comforting spaces; take risks!'. 'Take risks!'. Christian life should be invested in Jesus and spent for others. After meeting the Risen One one cannot wait; one must not delay; one must go, go out, despite all the problems and uncertainties. We see for example Saul who, after speaking with Jesus, despite being blind, gets up and enters the city. We see Ananias who, although fearful and reluctant, says: "Here I am, Lord" (v. 10), and immediately goes to Saul. We are all called, in whatever situation we may be, to be heralds of Paschal hope, 'Cyrenes of joy', as Fr Tonino used to say; servants of the world, but as risen ones, not as workers. Never feel sad; never give up. It is beautiful to be 'heralds of hope', simple and joyful distributors of the Easter *Hallelujah*.

Lastly Jesus says to Saul: "you will be told what you are to do". Saul, a decisive and successful man, falls silent and goes, docile to the Word of Jesus. He accepts and obeys, becomes patient, understands that his life no longer depends on himself. He learns humility. Because humble does not mean timid or modest, but docile to God and devoid of oneself. So humiliation too, such as that experienced by Saul prostrated on the road to Damascus, becomes providential, because it strips away presumption and allows God to lift us up again. The Word of God acts in this way: it frees, lifts, enables one to go on, humble and courageous at the same time. It does not make us affirmed protagonists and champions of our own skill, no: but genuine witnesses to Jesus, dead and Risen, in the world.

Bread and Word. Dear brothers and sisters, at every Mass we are nourished by the Bread of Life and the salvific Word: let us live what we celebrate! Thus, like Fr Tonino, we will be wellsprings of hope, joy and peace.

^[1] "Configurati a Cristo capo e sacerdote", *Cirenei della gioia* ["Conformed to Christ, head and priest", *Cyrenes of Joy*], 2004, 54-55.

^[2] "Sono credibili le nostre Eucaristie?", *Articoli, corrispondenze, lettere* ["Are our Eucharists credible?", *Articles, correspondence, letters*], 2003, 236.

^[3] "Servi nella Chiesa per il mondo" ["Servants in the Church for the world"], *ibid.*, 103-104.

^[4] "La non violenza in una società violenta", *Scritti di pace* ["Non-violence in a violent society", *Peace writings*], 1997, 66-67.

[5] “La pace come ricerca del volto”, *Omellerie e scritti quaresimali* [“Peace as a search for the Face”, *Lenten homelies and writings*], 1994, 317.

[6] “Lievito vecchio e pasta nuova”, *Vegliare nella notte* [“Old leaven and new dough”, *Keeping vigil in the night*], 1995, 91.

[7] *Ultimo saluto al termine della Messa Crismale* [Closing salutation at the end of Chrism Mass], 8 April 1993.