



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO AJACCIO FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONGRESS
“LA RELIGIOSITÉ POPULAIRE EN MÉDITERRANÉE”

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

*“Place d’Austerlitz” (“U Casone”) - Ajaccio
Sunday, 15 December 2024*

[Multimedia]

The crowds ask John the Baptist, “What then should we do?” (*Lk* 3:10). What should we do? We should listen carefully to this question, for it expresses a desire for spiritual renewal and a better life. John proclaims the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, and those who listen to his preaching want to be prepared for this encounter: the encounter with the Messiah, the encounter with Jesus.

Luke’s Gospel tells us that those who express the desire for conversion are the “outsiders”. It is not those who were generally considered closest, the Pharisees and doctors of the law, but those who were farthest away, the tax collectors, who were thought to be sinners, and the soldiers who ask, “Teacher, what should we do?” (*Lk* 3:12). This is a beautiful question that perhaps each of us could take to prayer before going to bed tonight: “Lord, what should I do to prepare my heart for Christmas?”. Those who consider themselves righteous are not renewed. Those regarded as public sinners, on the other hand, long to leave behind their former lives of dishonesty and violence, and to embark upon a new life. Those who are distant become close whenever Christ approaches. John responds to those tax collectors and soldiers by urging them to be fair, upright and honest (cf. *Lk* 3:13-14). The proclamation of the Lord’s coming stirs consciences. It appeals especially to the poor and the outcast, because he comes not to condemn but to save those who are lost (cf. *Lk* 15:4-32). The best way to open our hearts to the salvation brought by Jesus is to be

honest: "Lord, I am a sinner". All of us here today are sinners. All of us. "Lord, I am a sinner". And so, we approach Jesus in truth, not with the glamour of a false righteousness. Indeed, he comes precisely to save sinners.

This is why today we too can ask the same question that the crowds asked John the Baptist. In this season of Advent, let us find the courage to ask without fear, "What then should I do?", "What then should we do?" in order to prepare a humble heart, a trusting heart for the Lord's coming.

The Scriptures we have heard present us with two different ways of waiting for the Messiah: we can wait either with *suspicion* or with *joyful expectation*. We can await salvation with these two attitudes: either with suspicion or with joyful expectation. Let us reflect on these spiritual attitudes.

The first attitude, that of suspicion, is full of *distrust* and *anxiety*. When we think constantly of ourselves and our own needs, we lose the spirit of joy. Instead of awaiting the future with hope, we view it with diffidence. Caught up in worldly concerns, we are not open to the workings of God's providence. We do not know how to wait with the hope that the Holy Spirit brings us. The words of Saint Paul can serve as an antidote to rouse us from our lethargy: "Do not worry about anything" (*Phil 4:6*). When anguish overwhelms us, it destroys us. Pain, both physical pain and the hurt produced by family tragedies, is one thing, but anguish is quite different. As Christians, we must not be overwhelmed by anguish. Stop being distressed, disappointed or sad. How widespread are these spiritual ills nowadays, especially in places where consumerism reigns! I have seen so many people on the streets of Rome these days that are out shopping, doing their shopping, overwhelmed by the anxiety of consumerism that then disappears and leaves you empty. Societies that live on consumerism grow old; they remain unsatisfied, since they no longer know how to give. If we live only for ourselves, we will never find happiness. If we live like this (like a closed fist) and not like this (an open hand) we will not be happy. I think that if we live with our hands like this (closed), instead of using our hands to give, to help and to share, we will never be happy. This is an evil that all of us can fall into, all Christians, even priests, Bishops and Cardinals, all of us, even the Pope.

The Apostle proposes an effective remedy when he writes, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (*Phil 4:6*). Faith in God gives hope! The Congress that has just taken place here in Ajaccio stressed the importance of cultivating faith and appreciating the importance of popular piety. Let us take as an example the recitation of the Rosary. When we take up the Rosary and pray it well, it trains us to keep our hearts centred on Jesus Christ by sharing in the contemplative gaze of Mary. We can also think of the traditional Confraternities, which have much to teach us about generously serving our neighbours by works of spiritual and corporal mercy. These associations of the faithful, so rich in history, actively participate in the liturgy and the Church's prayer, which they enrich with popular songs and devotions. I encourage the members of the Confraternities to become ever more present, especially to those in greatest need, and in this way to practice their faith through acts of

charity. Those Confraternities who have a specific devotion are present to everyone, present to their neighbours in order to help them.

This brings us to the second attitude: *joyful expectation*. The first attitude was waiting with suspicion. For me this means waiting with your hands closed. The second attitude is joyful expectation. It is not easy to be joyful. Christian joy is neither shallow nor ephemeral, like the joy that comes from going to the fair. No, it is not like that. On the contrary, it is a joy rooted in the heart and built on a solid foundation. In this sense, the prophet Zephaniah could tell his listeners to rejoice, for “the Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory” (*Zeph* 3:17). Trust in the Lord who is in our midst, who dwells among us. We forget this so often: he is in our midst when we do a good deed, when we educate our children, when we care for the elderly. He is not in our midst, however, when we gossip or when we speak ill of others. The Lord is not present there, only we are. The Lord’s coming brings us salvation: that is the reason for our joy. God is “mighty”, Scripture tells us. He can redeem our lives because he is able to accomplish what he promises! Our joy is not a fleeting consolation that helps us to forget life’s sorrows. No, it is not a fleeting consolation. Our joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, born of faith in Christ the Saviour, who knocks at the door of our hearts and frees us from sorrow and lethargy. The Lord’s presence in our midst is a cause for celebration; it fills everyone’s future with hope. In the company of Jesus, we discover the authentic joy of living and we become signs of the hope that our world so eagerly seeks.

And the first of those signs of hope is *peace*. He who comes is Emmanuel, God with us, who bestows peace on those favoured by the Lord (cf. *Lk* 2:14). And as we prepare to welcome Jesus during this season of Advent, may our communities grow in their ability to accompany everyone, especially the young people preparing for Baptism and the other sacraments. And in a special way, the elderly as well. The elderly are the wisdom of a people. Let us never forget that! And each of us can ask ourselves: how do I react to the elderly? Do I try to care for them? Do I spend time with them? Do I listen to them? “Oh no, their stories are so boring!”. Do I abandon them? How many children abandon their parents in retirement homes! I remember once how, in another diocese, I went to visit a nursing home. And there was a lady there who had three or four children. I asked her: “And how are your children?” – “They are doing very well! I have many grandchildren” – “And do they come to see you?” – “Yes, they always come”. When I left the room, the nurse said: “They come once a year”. But the mother covered up her children’s shortcomings. So many people abandon the elderly. They wish them a Happy Christmas or Easter over the phone! Take care of the elderly; they are the wisdom of a people.

Let us consider the young people who are preparing for Baptism and the other sacraments. In Corsica, thank God, they are many! And congratulations! I have never seen so many children as I have here! It is a gift from God! And I have only seen two little dogs. Dear brothers and sisters, have children! Have children! They will be your joy, your consolation in the future. I am telling the truth: I have never seen so many children. I only saw this many in Timor-Leste, but nowhere else.

This is your joy and your glory.

The word of God never fails to encourage us. Despite sufferings that affect nations and peoples, the Church proclaims an unshakable hope that does not disappoint, because the Lord has come and dwells in our midst. And in his coming, our efforts to work for peace and justice find inexhaustible strength.

Sisters and brothers, in every time and amid every affliction, Christ remains present; Christ is the source of our joy. He is with us in every tribulation to carry us through and give us joy. Let us always foster this joy in our hearts, this assurance that Christ is with us, walking with us. Let us not forget this! And so, with this joy, with the security that Jesus is with us, we will be happy and make others happy. This must be our witness.

Final Words of Thanks

I thank Cardinal Bustillo for his words, and for this entire day during which I have felt at home! Thank you to all those who in different ways prepared this visit; to the Church community and the civil community. Go forward in harmony, in that diversity that does not divide you, always working together for the common good.

I greet and bless the sick, the elderly who are alone, and prisoners. May Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, “Madunnuccia” give comfort and hope to those who suffer.

Brothers and sisters, may the Gospel of Jesus Christ help you to have hearts open to the world: your traditions are a richness to be cherished and cultivated, but never in order to isolate yourselves, indeed they are always for encounter and sharing.

Thank you all! I wish you a good journey towards Christmas!

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