



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ASSISI

MEETING WITH THE POOR ASSISTED BY CARITAS

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Room of Renunciation of the Archbishop's Residence, Assisi

Friday, 4 October 2013

My Brother Bishop said that this is the first time in 800 years that a Pope has come here. In recent days the newspapers and media have been stirring up fantasies. “The Pope is going to strip the Church, there!”. “What will he strip from the Church?”. “He is going to strip bishops and cardinals of their vestments; then he will divest himself”. This is, indeed, a good occasion to invite the Church to divest herself. But we are all the Church! All of us! Beginning with the newly baptized, we are all Church, and we must all follow the path of Jesus, who himself took the road of renunciation. He became a servant, one who serves; he chose to be humiliated even to the Cross. And if we want to be Christians, there is no other way. But can’t we make Christianity a little more human — they say — without the cross, without Jesus, without renunciation? In this way we would become like Christians in a pastry shop, saying: what beautiful cakes, what beautiful sweets! Truly beautiful, but not really Christians! Someone could ask: “Of what must the Church divest herself?”. Today she must strip herself of a very grave danger, which threatens every person in the Church, everyone: the danger of worldliness. The Christian cannot coexist with the spirit of the world, with the worldliness that leads us to vanity, to arrogance, to pride. And this is an idol, it is not God. It is an idol! And idolatry is the gravest of sins!

When the media speaks about the Church, they believe the Church is made up of priests, sisters, bishops, cardinals and the Pope. But we are all the Church, as I said. And we all must strip ourselves of this worldliness: the spirit opposing the spirit of the Beatitudes, the spirit opposing the spirit of Jesus. Worldliness hurts us. It is so very sad to find a worldly Christian, sure — according to him — of that security that the faith gives and of the security that the world provides. You cannot

be on both sides. The Church — all of us — must strip herself of the worldliness that leads to vanity, to pride, that is idolatry.

Jesus himself told us: “You cannot serve two masters: either you serve God or you serve mammon” (cf. Mt 6:24). In mammon itself there is this worldly spirit; money, vanity, pride, that path... we cannot take it... it is sad to erase with one hand what we write with the other. The Gospel is the Gospel! God is one! And Jesus made himself a servant for our sake and the spirit of the world has nothing to do with this. Today I am here with you. Many of you have been stripped by this callous world that offers no work, no help. To this world it doesn't matter that there are children dying of hunger; it doesn't matter if many families have nothing to eat, do not have the dignity of bringing bread home; it doesn't matter that many people are forced to flee slavery, hunger and flee in search of freedom. With how much pain, how often don't we see that they meet death, like yesterday in Lampedusa: today is a day of tears! The spirit of the world causes these things. It is unthinkable that a Christian — a true Christian — be it a priest, a sister, a bishop, a cardinal or a Pope, would want to go down this path of worldiness, which is a homicidal attitude. Spiritual worldliness kills! It kills the soul! It kills the person! It kills the Church!

When Francis, here, made the gesture of divesting himself he was a young boy, he didn't have the strength for this. It was the strength of God that impelled him to do this, the strength of God who wanted to remind us of what Jesus prayed to the Father, that the Father save us from the spirit of the world. Today, here, let us ask for grace for all Christians. May the Lord give to all of us the courage to strip ourselves of the spirit of the world, not of 20 lire, but the spirit of the world, which is the leprosy, the cancer of society! It is the cancer of God's revelation! The spirit of the world is the enemy of Jesus! I ask the Lord that, he give us all this grace to strip ourselves. Thank you!

At the end of the meeting, he said the following words:

Thank you very much for your welcome. Pray for me, I need it... All of you! Thank you!

The following are the words that Pope Francis had prepared for this occasion and that he submitted for publication.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your welcome! This place is a special place, and that is why I wished to stop here, even though it is a very full day. Here Francis divested himself of everything, before his father, before the Bishop, and the people of Assisi. It was a prophetic gesture, and it was also an act of prayer, an act of love and of trust to the Father who is in Heaven.

With this gesture Francis made his choice: the choice to be poor. That is not a sociological, ideological choice, it is a choice to be like Jesus, to imitate him, to follow him to the end. Jesus is

God stripped of his glory. We read in St Paul: Christ Jesus, who was in the form of God, stripped himself, and made himself like us, and in this humiliation came to die on a cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8). Jesus is God, but he was born naked, he was placed in a manger, and he died naked and crucified. Francis stripped himself of everything, of his worldly life, of himself, to follow his Lord, Jesus, to be like him. Bishop Guido understood this act and immediately rose, embraced Francis and covered him with his cloak, and was ever after his helper and protector (cf. *Vita Prima, FF*, 344).

The renunciation of St Francis tells us simply what the Gospel teaches: following Jesus means putting him in first place, stripping ourselves of the many things that we possess that suffocate our hearts, renouncing ourselves, taking up the cross and carrying it with Jesus. Stripping ourselves of prideful ego and detaching ourselves from the desire to possess, from money, which is an idol that possesses.

We are all called to be poor, to strip us of ourselves; and to do this we must learn how to be with the poor, to share with those who lack basic necessities, to touch the flesh of Christ! The Christian is not one who speaks about the poor, no! He is one who encounters them, who looks them in the eye, who touches them. I am here not to “make news”, but to indicate that this is the Christian path, the path St Francis followed. St Bonaventure, speaking of the renunciation of St Francis, writes: “Thus, then, the servant of the Most High King was left despoiled, that he might follow the Lord Whom he loved”. And adds that in this way Francis was saved from “the shipwreck of the world” (*FF* 1043).

But I would, as a pastor, ask myself as well: What should the Church strip herself of?

She must strip away every kind of worldly spirit, which is a temptation for everyone; strip away every action that is not for God, that is not from God; strip away the fear of opening the doors and going out to encounter all, especially the poorest of the poor, the needy, the remote, without waiting. Certainly not to get lost in the shipwreck of the world, but to bear with courage the light of Christ, the light of the Gospel, even in the darkness, where one can't see, where one might stumble. She must strip away the seeming assurance structures give, which, though certainly necessary and important, should never obscure the one true strength it carries within: God. He is our strength! To strip away what is not essential, because our reference is Christ; the Church is Christ's! Many steps, above all in these decades, have been taken. Let us continue on this path, Christ's, the path of Saints.

For everyone, even for our society that is showing signs of fatigue, if we want to save ourselves from sinking, it is necessary to follow the path of poverty. That does not mean misery — this idea should be refuted — it means knowing how to share, how to be more in solidarity with those in need, to entrust oneself more to God and less to our human efforts. Archbishop Sorrentino reminded us of Bishop Nicolini's work for solidarity, helping hundreds of Jews by hiding them in

convents, and the secret clearing house here, in this very bishop's residence. This too is a stripping away, that is always part of the love, the mercy of God!

In this place that challenges us, I would like to pray that every Christian, the Church, every man and woman of goodwill, know how to strip themselves of what is not essential in order to go to meet the poor and ask to loved by them. Thank you all!