



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO A MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS

*Bologna Hall
Thursday, 27 February 2014*

1. The essential mission of the Congregation

In celebrating the Ordination of a Bishop, the Church gathers, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and asks that the candidate who has been presented be ordained. The one presiding then asks: “Have you a mandate?”, thereby emulating the Lord’s act: “He called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two...” (Mk 6:7). Essentially, one might also express the question thus: “Are you certain that the Lord has spoken your name? Are you certain that it is the Lord who has numbered you among those called to remain with him in a unique way, and in order to entrust to you the mission that is not his own but rather was entrusted to the Lord by the Father?”.

This Congregation exists to help write that mandate, which will then resound in many churches and bring joy and hope to the holy People of God. This Congregation exists to ensure that the name of the one who is chosen has first been spoken by the Lord. This is the great mission entrusted to the Congregation for Bishops, whose most difficult task is to identify those whom the Holy Spirit himself is placing at the helm of his Church.

In every age and in every place we shall receive this petition from the lips of the Church: give us a Bishop! The holy People of God continues to speak: we need one who will watch over us from above; we need one who will see us with the fullness of God’s heart; we do not need a *manager*, a chief executive officer of a company, nor one who remains at the level of our pettiness and little pretensions. We need someone who knows how to raise himself to the heights of God’s gaze over us and in order to lead us to him. Our future lies in God’s gaze. We need someone who, owing to

his greater familiarity with the wide expanses of God's field than with the confines of his own narrow garden, is able to assure us that what our hearts aspire to is not a vain promise.

People toil the plains of everyday life and need to be guided by those who are able to see things from above. Therefore, we must never lose sight of the needs of the particular Churches for which we provide. There is no *standard* Pastor for all the Churches. Christ knows the unique qualities of the Pastor that each Church requires, so that he can respond to its needs and help it realize its full potential. Our challenge is to enter into Christ's perspective, keeping in mind the uniqueness of the particular Churches.

2. *God's horizon determines the Congregation's mission*

In order to choose such ministers we all need to raise ourselves, climb to "higher levels". We cannot help but go up, we cannot be content with lower standards. We must rise over and above our own varied preferences, likes, affiliations or tendencies in order to enter into the expanse of God's horizon, and to find these who bear his gaze from above. Not men conditioned by petty fears from below, but rather Pastors endowed with *parrhesia*, who are able to ensure that a sacrament of unity exists (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1) in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion.

It is this great objective traced by the Spirit which determines the manner in which this generous and demanding task is carried out, for which I am immensely grateful to each one of you, beginning with the Cardinal Prefect Marc Ouellet and embracing all of you, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops who are Members. I would like to address a special word of appreciation for the generous work of the Officials of the dicastery, who silently and *patiently* contribute to the success of the service of providing the Church with the Pastors she needs.

In signing the appointment of each Bishop I would like to be able to see and touch the authoritativeness of your discernment and the breadth of the horizon with which your counsel deliberates. Therefore, the spirit that presides over your work, from the demanding task carried out by the Officials to the discernment made by the Superiors and Members of the Congregation, cannot be other than that humble, silent and painstaking process carried out under the light that comes from above. Professionalism, service and holiness of life: if we deviate from this trio we shall fall from the greatness to which we are called.

3. *The Apostolic Church as source*

Where then do we find this light? The loftiness of the Church is always found in the deep abysses of her foundations. What is lofty and deep exists in the Apostolic Church. The Church's future always abides in her origins.

Therefore, I invite you to remember and “to visit” the Apostolic Church to seek several criteria therein. We know that the Episcopal College, in which the bishops are incorporated through the Sacrament, succeeds the Apostolic College. The world needs to know that this uninterrupted Succession exists. At least in the Church, this bond with the divine *arché* has not been broken. People are already painfully familiar with the experience of many ruptures: they need to find in the Church that indelible continuance of original grace.

4. *Bishop as witness of the Risen One*

Let us therefore examine the moment in which the Apostolic Church had to reassemble the College of the Twelve after Judas’ betrayal. Without the *Twelve* the fullness of the Holy Spirit could not descend. The successor is sought among those who followed Jesus’ journey from the beginning and now could become, “together with the twelve”, a “witness to his Resurrection” (cf. Acts 1:21-22). The witnesses of the Risen One had to be selected from among those who followed Jesus.

Hence derives the essential criterion for sketching the profile of the bishops we want to have. Who is a witness to the Risen One? It is the one who has followed Jesus from the beginning and who is established with the Apostles as a witness to his Resurrection. This is also a unifying criterion for us: the Bishop is the one able to make all that happened to Jesus relevant today and above all he knows, *together* with the Church, how to be a witness to his Resurrection. The Bishop is first and foremost a martyr for the Risen One. He does not stand alone as a witness but stands *together* with the Church. His life and ministry must make the Resurrection credible. In becoming one with Christ in the cross of the true gift of himself, he makes the life that never dies flow forth for his Church. The courage to die, and the generosity to offer his life and to expend himself for the flock are inscribed in the “DNA” of the Bishop. Renunciation and sacrifice are connatural with the mission of the Bishop. And I wish to emphasize this: renunciation and sacrifice are connatural with the mission of the Bishop. The episcopate does not exist for itself but for the Church, for the flock, for others, especially for those whom the world would throw away.

Therefore, to identify a bishop, a list of human, intellectual, cultural and even pastoral qualities are not useful. The profile of a bishop is not the algebraic sum of his virtues. Certainly he must be outstanding (*CIC*, can. 378 § 1): his human integrity ensures his capacity for healthy, balanced relationships, so as not to project his own shortcomings onto others and become an element of instability; his Christian soundness is essential for promoting fraternity and communion; his upright behaviour attests to the high standard of the disciples of the Lord; his cultural preparation allows him to dialogue with men and their cultures; his orthodoxy and fidelity to the Truth whole and integral, which the Church safeguards, makes of him a pillar and point of reference; his interior and exterior discipline allow for self-mastery and open up opportunities for welcoming and leading others; his ability to govern with paternal firmness ensures the safety of the authority that leads to growth; his transparency and detachment in the administrations of the goods of the community

invest him with authority and meet with the esteem of all. All of these indispensable gifts must nonetheless be secondary to the central witness to the Risen One, subordinate to this primary commitment. It is the Spirit of the Risen One who fashions his witnesses, who integrates and elevates their qualities and value in fashioning a bishop.

5. *The sovereignty of God author of the choice*

But let us return to the Apostolic text. After difficult discernment comes the Apostles' prayer: "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these ... thou hast chosen" (Acts 1:24) and "they cast lots" (Acts 1:26). Let us learn the climate of our work and the true Author of our choice. We cannot distance ourselves from this you "show us, Lord". It is always essential to guarantee God's sovereignty. The choice cannot be dictated by our demands, conditioned by possible "stables", factions or hegemonies. Two fundamental realities are needed for guaranteeing this sovereignty: the tribunal of one's own *conscience* before God, and *collegiality*. And this is the guarantee.

These two realities are essential from the first steps of our complex work (from the Nunciatures to the work of Officials, Members and Superiors): one's conscience before God and collegial commitment. Not arbitrary power but discernment together. No one can manage everything; each one, with humility and honesty, lays his own badge in a mosaic which belongs to God. This fundamental vision prompts us to leave our small trading vessels to follow the course of the great ship of God's Church, his universal horizon of salvation, his compass which is held firm in the Word and the Ministry, the certainty of the breath of the Spirit who brings it into the safety of the harbour that awaits us.

6. *'Kerygmatic' Bishops*

Acts 6:1-7 teaches us about another criterion: the Apostles lay hands on those who were to serve tables, for they could not "give up preaching the word of God". Because faith comes from the proclamation, we need *kerygmatic* Bishops. Men who make the "for you" of which St Paul speaks accessible. Men who are guardians of doctrine not in order to measure how far away the world lives from the truth it contains, but in order to attract the world, to enchant it by the beauty of love, to seduce it with the offer of the freedom which is given by the Gospel. The Church does not need apologists for her causes nor crusaders for her battles but rather humble and confident sowers of the Truth who know that it is always given to them anew and who trust in its power. Bishops who know that, even when night comes and the day's fatigue finds them weary, the seeds are germinating in the field. Men who are patient because they know that the weeds will never be so many that they fill the field. The human heart is made for the grain of wheat, it was the enemy who secretly sowed the bad seed. The limit of the weeds, however, is already irrevocably fixed.

I would like to emphasize this: patient men! They say that Cardinal Siri would repeatedly say:

“Bishops have five virtues: first patience, second patience, third patience, fourth patience, and lastly patience with those who invite us to have patience”. We need then to commit ourselves more to preparing the soil, to the breadth of the sowing. To act like confident sowers, by avoiding the fear of those who delude themselves into believing that the crop depends only on itself, or the hopeless attitude of students who, having failed to do their homework, cry out that there is nothing to be done.

7. *Praying Bishops*

The same text of Acts 6:1-7 refers to prayer as one of the two essential tasks of the Bishop: “Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (vv. 3-4). I spoke about kerygmatic Bishops, now I wish to note the other trait of the identity of a bishop: a man of prayer. He ought to have the same *parrhesia* in prayer that he has in proclaiming the Word, by speaking with God Our Lord about the good of his people, about the salvation of his people. Courageous in intercessory prayer like Abraham, who negotiated with God for the people’s salvation (cf. Gen 18:22-23); like Moses when he felt powerless in guiding the people (Num 11:10-15), when the Lord was annoyed with his people (cf. Num 14:10-19), or when he tells him that he is about to destroy the people and promises to make him head of another people. The courage to say no, I will not negotiate my people before him (cf. Ex 32:11-14, 30-32)! A man who does not have the courage to contend with God on behalf of his people cannot be a bishop — I say this from the heart, I am convinced — nor one who is incapable of taking on the mission of leading the people of God to the place that he, the Lord, has indicated to him (cf. Ex 32:33-34).

And this also applies to apostolic patience: he ought to have the same *hypomone* in his prayer, which he has to exercise in preaching the Word (cf. 2 Cor 6:4) A bishop must be able to “enter in patience” into the presence of God, gazing and allowing himself to be gazed upon, seeking and allowing himself to be sought, finding and allowing himself to be found, patiently before the Lord. Many times falling asleep in the presence of the Lord, but this is good, it does one good!

Parrhesia and *hypomone* in prayer temper the heart of the Bishop and accompany him in the *parrhesia* and *hypomone* he must have in proclaiming the Word in kerygma. This is what I understand when I read the fourth verse of Chapter 6 of the Acts of the Apostles.

8. *Pastor Bishops*

In the words which I addressed to the Pontifical Representatives, I outlined the profile of candidates for the episcopate in this way: may they be Pastors who are close to the people, “fathers and brothers, may they be gentle, patient and merciful; may they love poverty, interior poverty, as freedom for the Lord, and exterior poverty, as well as simplicity and a modest lifestyle;

may they not have the mindset of ‘princes’; ... Be careful that they are not ambitious, that they are not in quest of the episcopate... may they be bridegrooms of one Church, without being constantly on the lookout for another — this is called adultery. May they be able to ‘watch over’ the flock that will be entrusted to them, in other words to care for all that keeps it united; ... able to ‘keep watch over the flock” (21 June 2013).

I repeat that the Church needs authentic Pastors; and I would like to expand upon this profile of the Pastor. Let us look at the testimony of the Apostle Paul (cf. Acts 20:17-38). It is the only address delivered by the Apostle in the Book of Acts which is directed to the Christians. He does not speak to his adversaries the Pharisees nor to the wise Greeks, but to his own. He speaks to us. He commends the Pastors of the Church “to the word of his grace” which is able to build [them] up and to give [them] the inheritance”. Therefore, not masters of the Word but rather commended to it, servants of the Word. Only thus is it possible to build up and obtain the inheritance of the saints. To those who torment themselves over the question of their own inheritance — “what is a bishop’s legacy? Gold or silver?” — Paul responds: holiness. The Church endures and abides when God’s holiness is spread among its members. When, from her inmost heart, which is the Most Holy Trinity, this holiness flows forth and reaches the whole Body. The anointing should run down from on high to the hem of her mantle. A bishop should never give up the anxious desire that oil of the Spirit of holiness reach the last fold of the robe of his Church.

The Second Vatican Council states concerning bishops that, “the pastoral charge, that is, the permanent and daily care of their sheep, is entrusted to them fully” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 27). We should reflect more on these two qualities of the care of the flock: *permanent* and *daily*. In our own day, habitual and daily are often associated with *routine* and boredom. And so we often try to escape to a permanent “elsewhere”. This is a temptation for Pastors, for all Pastors. Spiritual fathers should explain this to us, so that we understand it and do not fall into it. Even in the Church, unfortunately, we are not exempt from this risk. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that the mission of the Bishop requires diligence and daily commitment. I think that the Council of Trent’s Decree on episcopal residence is extremely relevant now as we meet and gather: it is so relevant and it would be good for the Congregation for Bishops to write something about it. The flock needs to find a place in their Pastor’s heart. If this is not firmly anchored within himself, in Christ and in his Church, he will be constantly buffeted by the waves in search of an ephemeral compensation and will offer no shelter to the flock.

Conclusion

As I conclude with these words I ask myself: where can we find such men? It is not easy. Do they exist? How do we select them? I think of the Prophet Samuel as he searched for Saul’s successor (cf. 1 Sam 16:11-13); he asks the aged Jesse: “Are all your sons here?”. And hearing that the young David was keeping watch over the sheep he ordered: “Send and fetch him”. We also cannot help but scan the fields of the Church looking for someone to present to the Lord so that he might

say to you: “Anoint him: for this is he”. I am sure they are there, for the Lord does not abandon his Church. Perhaps it is we who do not wander enough through the fields looking for them. Perhaps we need Samuel’s instructions: “We will not sit down till he comes here”. It is this holy restlessness that I would have this congregation live.