



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO CASSANO ALL'JONIO

MEETING WITH DIOCESAN PRIESTS

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Cathedral (Cassano all'Jonio)

Saturday, 21 June 2014

Dear Priests,

I thank you for your welcome! I have looked forward to this meeting with you who carry the daily weight of parish work.

I would like first of all to share with you *the joy of being priests*. The ever new surprise of having been called, rather, of having been called by the Lord Jesus. Called to follow Him, to be with Him, to share His word with others, His forgiveness.... There's nothing finer for a man than this, isn't it true? When we priests are before the tabernacle, and we pause there for a moment, in silence, we then feel Jesus' gaze upon us once more, this gaze renews us, reinvigorates us....

Of course, at times it's not easy to be before the Lord; it's not easy because we have so many things to do, so many people.... But at times it's not easy because we feel a certain discomfort, Jesus' gaze is a little unsettling, even causes us distress.... But this is good for us! In the silence of prayer Jesus shows us whether we are working well, like good workmen, or whether we may have become more like "employees"; whether we are open and generous "channels" through which his love, his grace flow in abundance, or whether we focus on ourselves, and thus instead of being "channels" we become "screens" which do not promote the encounter with the Lord, with the light and the power of the Gospel.

And the second thing I should like to share with you is *the beauty of fraternity*: of being priests together, of following the Lord not alone, not one by one, but together, and also in the great variety of gifts and personalities. Indeed, this is precisely what enriches the presbyterate, this variety of background, of age, of talents.... And all lived in communion, in fraternity.

This is neither easy nor immediate and we cannot take it for granted. First of all because even we priests are immersed in the subjectivistic overlay of today's culture, this culture which glorifies the 'I' to the point of idolizing it. And then due to a certain pastoral individualism which is, unfortunately, widespread in our dioceses. This is why we have to react by choosing fraternity. I am intentionally speaking about "choice". This cannot just be left to chance, to fortuitous circumstances.... No, it's a choice, which corresponds to the reality that constitutes us, to the gift that we have received but that must always be heard and cultivated: communion in Christ in the presbytery, around the Bishop. This communion demands to be lived by seeking concrete forms adapted to the times and to the reality of the region, but always in an apostolic perspective, with a missionary lifestyle, with fraternity and simplicity of life. When Jesus says: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35), He is certainly saying it to everyone, but first of all to the Twelve, to those He called to follow Him more closely.

The joy of being priests and the beauty of fraternity. These are the two things I felt were the most important when thinking about you. One last thing I'll just touch on: I encourage you in your work with families and for the family. This is work that the Lord asks us to do in a special way in these times, which are difficult times both for *the family* as an institution, and for *families* due to the crisis. But just when times are tough, God lets us feel His closeness, His grace, the prophetic strength of His Word. And we are called to be witnesses, mediators of this closeness to families and of this prophetic strength for the family.

Dear brothers, I thank you. Let us go forth, invigorated by the common love for the Lord and for the Holy Mother Church. May Our Lady protect you and go with you. Let us remain united in prayer. Thank you!