



The Holy See

REETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

Thursday, 16 February 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank the Reverend Dirk Gevers, Secretary General of the United Bible Societies for his words of greeting. To all of you, and to Cardinal Koch who has accompanied you, I offer my welcome. “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 16:23-24).

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the spread of the word of God following the events of Easter. After Pentecost, with the power and prompting of the Holy Spirit, the apostles spread the kerygma, explained the meaning of the Scriptures in light of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and warned of those who misuse or exploit that word for base interests.

The experiences of the early Church are not unlike those of our own day. The word is proclaimed, heard and lived in situations both favourable and unfavourable, in different ways and in various languages, and confronts grave difficulties and persecutions in a world often deaf to the voice of God.

The early Church lived from the word, proclaimed it and, when fleeing from persecution, brought it along as its only baggage. Persecutions became occasions for spreading the word, and never for leaving it behind. The case of the deacon Philip is emblematic: driven by persecution to Samaria, once he arrived, he said nothing of his hardships, but proclaimed Jesus Christ and healed the sick, with the result that “there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8).

My thoughts turn to all those Christians who in this, our own time, are forced to flee from their

lands. Men and women who, like the first believers, carry with them in their flight the word they have received. They cherish their faith as a treasure that gives meaning to the harsh and, at times, devastating situations that they must face. Embracing the cross of Christ, they revere the word of God which “will stand forever” (*Is* 40:8; cf. *1 Pet* 1:23-25).

The Book of Acts also gives us a word of caution. In carrying out his mission, Philip encountered, in two of the people he met, an inability to understand and accept the word of God. In very different circumstances, both had access to that word, but Simon Magus was so full of himself that he proved incapable of receiving the gift of God. The Ethiopian, on the other hand, was thirsting for God; he not only came to understand the word through Philip’s ministry, but also asked him for baptism, received it, and “went on his way rejoicing” as a Christian (cf. *Acts* 8:39).

Dear brothers and sisters, God’s word continues to “run swiftly” in our day too, and by your activity, you have placed yourself at its service. The diffusion of the Bible through the publication of texts in various languages and their distribution in the various continents is a praiseworthy endeavour. The data you publish are significant; and I am pleased to know that the work of the United Bible Societies is increasingly carried out in cooperation with many Catholics in a number of countries.

I ask the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain your service always. For the Spirit can reveal the depths of God, so that those who approach the sacred text, can come to “the obedience of faith” (*Rom* 16:26) and an encounter with God through Jesus Christ (cf. v. 27).

I thank you for this visit and I cordially invoke the Lord’s blessing on you and your work. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.