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Eucharistic Celebration for the first anniversary of the earthquake in Norcia, presided at by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin

The following is the homily pronounced by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin this morning during the Eucharistic celebration in front of the façade of the Basilica of Saint Benedict in Norcia, on the first anniversary of the earthquake:

Homily of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Excellency,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear priests,
Dear citizens of Norcia,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are gathered here today for this Eucharistic celebration before the façade of the Basilica of Saint Benedict, a year after the earthquake in Valnerina that, after the first tremors of 24 August, between 26 and 30 October 2016 disrupted the normal rhythm of life in these lands, rich in art, natural beauty and cultural traditions, which finds their most solid inspiration in the Christian faith. A faith lived and witnessed throughout the centuries, which have modelled the face of these hills and these spaces, which promote meditation and contemplation, and have formed both consciences and the architecture of your squares and your churches.

The beauty of creation and the laboriousness of man who cares for it, the harmonious succession of valleys, rivers, lakes and mountains and the work of man who wisely constructs towns and cities is nevertheless always a part of the great mystery of the universe, and must face the irrationality of the natural forces, which often appear as an opportunity and wealth to be wisely managed, and are sometimes expressed instead as a destructive force that we can not predict with precision, nor can we fully govern.

The earthquake is one of these forces, and reminds us that although we can do much to limit the effects, our

existence remains subject to the immensity of cosmic forces. It reminds us above all that the creation – splendid and worthy of our admiration – refers to the Creator and that the human being is in His hands, led by Him to a definitive destiny of salvation, peace and happiness, where there will be no earthquakes or anxieties of the soul, and we will all arrive at our destination.

The façade of this Basilica, encased in scaffolding for reconstruction works, is the emblem of the earthquake, but it is even greater evidence of the capacity of the human being to rise up again, to return to hope, to look up to Heaven and, with the strength of this gaze, to return to the earth and put all his intelligence, skill, imagination and effort to the service of joint redemption, to lift up together along with the walls of houses, workplaces and churches, also the morale of the people and communities and the joy of living.

The readings of this Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time help us. There is a clear thread that unites them, and this is precisely the close relationship between God's love, and love for one's neighbour, between contemplation and action, between adoration of Our Lord and full willingness to serve man, for each person to be for his neighbour visible testimony of charity.

As we have just heard in the Gospel passage from St. Matthew, the greatest commandment has a twofold inseparable form, one of which confirms the truth and the necessity of the other.

Indeed, one cannot truly love one's neighbour without loving the Lord, without granting Him the first place; if, explicitly or implicitly, one does not recognize oneself to be dependent on Someone far greater than us Who is at the origin of our being and that Whom we will meet fully at the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

Without that inner peace that comes from knowing God's love and being reconciled to Him, love for one's neighbour is subject to the risk of serious distortion and partiality. Without loving God, love for the enemy is inconceivable, and love for those who are very distant from or different to us is also very difficult. In the end, it even becomes hard to love intelligently the people close to us, ourselves and the creation in which we are immersed and in which we move. Indeed, when a solid relationship with God is lacking, we end up no longer enduring neither limits, nor the wounds and harshness that existence itself entails.

On the other hand, however, a love of God that seeks to isolate itself from the human being would be its most evident negation. If God sent His Son into the world to save Him, if the cross is the pinnacle of God's love for the human being, how can a believer in God not love the human being? How can we not realize that the surest confirmation of our love for God, Whom we do not see, is love, compassion and tenderness toward the human beings we meet every day?

As the Apostle James said, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled", without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (*James 2, 14-17*).

In turn, St. John Chrysostom warned: "Do you want to honour Christ's body? Do not allow him to be scorned in its members, that is, in the poor: do not neglect him when he is naked; do not, while you honour him here with silken garments, neglect Him perishing outside of cold and nakedness. ... This [the body of Christ on the altar] has no need of coverings, but of a pure soul; but that requires much attention" (*Homily No. 5 on the Gospel of St. Matthew*).

The Pharisees, who were scholars, but wrapped up in themselves and unable to open up to the fullness of truth, believed that Jesus was challenging their question as to what the greatest commandment was. The Lord's answer instead puts in front of the mirror every conscience that claims to believe in God and invites him to confirm his faith with mercy, kindness, generosity towards our neighbour in need and towards all.

The Pharisees, like all those who shield themselves behind the literal observation of laws and traditions so as to

betray their authentic spirit undisturbed, are to be challenged, are invited to live fully love for God and for neighbour, if they truly intend to call themselves religious.

Following the natural disasters, after the elements were unleashed, also generosity, altruism, the race to donate their time, energies and money began, to help those most affected and in need. In these predicaments, all public powers, in synergy with civil society organizations and individuals, engaged in joint action to bring relief.

I think in particular of the efforts of various public institutions such as the Civil Protection and various local and state authorities, the solidarity manifested to the Church of Spoleto-Norcia by the Holy Father, by the Holy See, by various dioceses and by the Episcopal Conference; I think of the generosity of parishes, institutes and religious associations and, in a special way, the support and closeness to you shown by diocesan and national Caritas. I think of the many private citizens who made an active contribution.

The European institutions made the significant commitment to funding the reconstruction of this Basilica, implicitly recognizing the irreplaceable role for Europe of Christianity and culture it has been able to inspire.

The generosity that is inevitably found in the aftermath of the calamities is also an implicit manifestation of faith, which starts from the recognition of being all brothers and sisters to be helped in rising up from difficulty. Every gesture of charity contains within itself the seed of faith and the light of hope.

I mention this not to provide at all costs a religious interpretation of every act of goodness, but because wherever we encounter generosity and charity, we also perceive the good scent of God, the gentle aroma of His presence. He Who is moved by charity, even if not fully aware of it, is moved by God, for God is charity, a real love that is freely given.

From this highly symbolic place I appeal to all civil, ecclesial and private institutions to cooperate with alacrity and consistency, in harmony with the people concerned, so that this synergy demonstrated in the early days after the earthquake may continue and intensify, so that the works which have been planned and initiated may be completed, streamlining procedures as far as possible. Every effort must be made to avoid the depopulation of several villages, repeatedly injured by the telluric events that have involved them over the decades, causing the collapse of structures and widespread damage.

I therefore hope for concerted and decisive action to move resources and intelligence so as to reconstruct, along with the houses and the churches, also the soul of the people, to overcome fear and resignation, two invisible calamities, yet almost as severe as an earthquake.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am pleased to bring you the greeting and blessing of the Holy Father Francis, united with His prayer and His affection.

The Pope, in memory of the visit he made to San Pellegrino di Norcia on 4 October 2016 and at the audience on 5 January with the populations affected by the earthquake, encourages you to resume the journey, not to let yourself be oppressed by difficulties, but to look forward in hope for the future. He exhorts you to draw from the example of your history the strength that has always allowed you to rise after all difficult tests.

The Holy Father, in the hope that you may all overcome the consequences of the earthquake as soon as possible through the commitment and solidarity of many brothers and sisters, exhorts you to trustfully address the Lord Jesus and His Mother Mary, to open without hesitation the door of the heart and the mind, to receive, together with the consolation of the Lord, the energy necessary to continue the reconstruction work with determination and courage.

So be it.

