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Holy Mass for the opening of the 21st General Assembly of “Caritas Internationalis”

At 17.00 today, Thursday of the fifth week of Easter, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis celebrated Holy Mass on the occasion of the opening of the 21st General Assembly of *Caritas Internationalis* on the theme: “One human family, one common home”, inspired by Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si’* (Rome, 23 to 28 May 2019).

The following is the homily pronounced by the Pope during the Eucharistic celebration:

Homily of the Holy Father

The Word of God, in the Reading for the day from the Acts of the Apostles, narrates the first big reunion in the history of the Church. An unexpected situation had come up: the pagans were embracing the faith. And so a question arose: do they need also to adapt themselves, like the others, to the norms of the ancient Law? It was a difficult decision to make and the Lord was no longer present. It could be asked: why hadn’t Jesus left some recommendation that could have at least resolved this first “big dispute” (*Acts 5,7*)? Even a small suggestion would have been enough for the Apostles, who had been with Him every day for years. Why hadn’t Jesus given rules that were always clear which would have led to rapid resolutions?

This is the temptation to *efficiency*, of thinking that the Church is all right if it has everything under control, if it lives without disturbances, with its agenda always in order. But the Lord does not work that way, in fact, he does not send a response from heaven to the Apostles, he sends the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit does not come bearing an agenda, he comes as fire. Jesus does not want the Church to be a perfect model, which is pleased with its own organization and is capable of defending its own good name. Jesus did not live like that, but as one on a journey, without fearing life’s surprises. The Gospel is our programme of life. It teaches us that questions should not be confronted with a ready-to-use recipe and that faith is not a road map, but it is a “Way” (*Acts 9,2*) to travel together, always together, with a spirit of trust. From the account in Acts we learn three essential elements for the Church on its way: *the humility of listening, the charism of the whole, the courage of renunciation.*

Let's begin with the last point, the *courage of renunciation*. The outcome of that big dispute was not that of imposing something new, but of letting go of something old. But those first Christians did not abandon things that didn't count: it was about traditions and important religious precepts that were dear to the chosen people. What was at stake was religious identity. Yet, they chose that the proclamation of the Lord came first and that was what counted more than anything. For the good of the mission, to proclaim that God is Love to everyone in a way that was transparent and credible, even those human convictions and traditions which are more an obstacle than a help, can and must be let go of. We too need to rediscover together *the beauty of renunciation*, above all of ourselves. Saint Peter says that the Lord "purified their hearts by faith" (see *Acts 15,9*). God purifies, simplifies, he often makes things grow by taking away, not by adding, which is what we would do. True faith purifies from attachments. To follow the Lord requires walking quickly and to walk quickly you need to lighten yourself, even if it costs. As a Church, we are not called to commercial undertakings, but to evangelical enterprises. In purifying ourselves, in reforming ourselves we must avoid *gattopardismo*, that is, making it seem that something has changed when in reality nothing has changed. This happens when, for example, to keep up with the times, the surface is touched up, but it is only make-up to make something seem new. The Lord does not want cosmetic adjustments; He wants the conversion of the heart which happens through renunciation. Going out of oneself is the fundamental reform.

Let us see how the first Christians arrived there. They arrived at having the courage of renunciation beginning with the *humility of listening*. They practiced being *disinterested in themselves*: we see that each person allows the other to speak and is willing to change their own convictions. Only the one who allows the voice of another to truly enter within him or herself knows how to listen. When interest in others grows, disinterest in oneself grows. One becomes humble by following the path of listening, which holds you back from wanting to be affirmed, from resolutely advancing your own ideas, from seeking consensus by any means. Humility is born when, rather than speaking, one listens; when you stop being at the centre. It then grows through humiliations. It is the path of human service, the one that Jesus trod. It is on this path of charity that the Spirit descends and directs.

For the person who wants to travel the paths of charity, the humility of listening means *ears turned to the least*. Let us turn our gaze once again to the first Christians: everyone became silent to listen to Barnabas and Paul. They were the last to have arrived, but they allow them to report all that God had accomplished through them (see v. 12). Listening to everyone's voice is always important, especially the littlest and the last. In the world, those who have more possibilities speak the most, but it must not be like this among us because God loves to reveal himself through the smallest and the least. And He asks everyone not to look at anyone from top down.

Lastly, *listening to life*: Paul and Barnabas recount experiences, not ideas. The Church discerns like this; not before the *computer*, but before the peoples' experiences. People before programmes, with the humble gaze of one who seeks the presence of God in others, who does not inhabit in the greatness of that which we accomplish, but in the littleness of the poor persons that we meet. If we do not look directly at them, we will end up looking always at ourselves and exploiting them in order to affirm ourselves.

From the humility of listening to the courage of renunciation, it all passes through *the charism of the whole*. In fact, in the discussion the early Church had, unity always prevails over differences. Each one prefers not their own preferences and strategies but that of being and feeling a part of the Church of Jesus, gathered around Peter, through charity, which does not create uniformity, but communion. No one knew everything, non possessed *charisms in their entirety*, but each one possessed the *charism of the whole*. This is essential because true good cannot be done unless people care for each other. What was the secret of these Christians? They had different sensibilities and leanings, there were even strong personalities, but there was the strength of loving each other in the Lord. We see this in James, who, at the moment when he draws the conclusions, he says few words of his own, but many from the Word of God (cfr vv. 16-18). He allows the Word of God to speak. While the voices of the devil and the world lead to division, the voice of the Good Shepherd forms one sole flock. This is how the community is founded on the Word of God and remains in His love.

"Remain in my love (*John 15,9*): this is what Jesus asks in the Gospel. But how? We need to stay near Him, the Bread that is broken. It is helpful to staying before the tabernacle and before many living tabernacles who are the poor. The Eucharist and the poor, a non-moving tabernacle and moving tabernacles: there one remains in love and absorbs the mentality of the Bread that is broken. There one understands the "as" of which Jesus

speaks: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (*ibid.*). And *how* did the Father love Jesus? Giving Him everything, not withholding anything for himself. We say it in the Creed: "God from God, light from light"; He gave Him everything. When, instead, we withhold from giving, when we prefer defending our own interests, we do not act *as God* acts, we are not one *Church, free and freeing*. Jesus asks that we remain *in Him*, not in our ideas, to let go of the pretense of controlling and managing; He asks us to trust in others and to give ourselves to the other. Let us ask the Lord that he free us from efficiency, from worldliness, from the subtle temptation of worshiping ourselves and our bravura. Let us ask the grace of welcoming the way indicated by the Word of God: *humility, communion, renunciation*.
