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Holy Mass for the Vatican Gendarmerie Corps

This afternoon, at 17.00, at the Lourdes Grotto of the Vatican Gardens, the Holy Father Francis presided at the Eucharistic Celebration for the Vatican Gendarmerie Corps, on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Michael Archangel, patron and protector of the Italian State Police and the Vatican Gendarmerie Corps.

The following is the text of the homily the Pope pronounced during the Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

A first reading of the Gospel, of this passage of the Gospel, can perhaps lead us to mistake the message for a teaching of Jesus in favour of almsgiving, in favour of justice, that is, a teaching of Jesus of a moral type. But it is something else. Jesus wants to enter precisely into the human path of an entire life, and for this Gospel He speaks of two lives: of a rich man and a poor man, of the paths of each one. This Gospel makes us see destiny – not a magical destiny, no – the destiny that a man or a woman can make for him- or herself, because we make our destiny, we journey on our way and very often we make our own path. Sometimes the Lord intervenes, the Lord gives grace, but we are responsible for our journey. The Lord gives us the gratuitousness of grace, He helps us always to go in his presence, but our journey, the responsibility for our journey, is ours. I would like to enter a little into this message.

“There was a rich man, who wore purple clothes and very fine linen, and every day he gave himself to lavish banquets”. This is one life. There is another: “A poor man, named Lazarus, stood at his door, covered with sores, eager to feed himself with what fell from the table of the rich man; but it was the dogs who came to lick his sores”. Two lives. Not a moment of life: two paths of life, because the rich man continued to lead this life and the poor man continued to suffer in poverty. It is not a fanciful thing: this happens every day in every city, in every part of the world. The Lord recounts this passage from the Gospel with great peace and serenity.

Instead, in the first reading we listened to the prophet Amos, who does not speak of this with such serenity. “Woe”, he begins, “woe to the carefree people of Zion and to those who consider themselves safe on the

mountain of Samaria! Lying on ivory beds and lying on their couches, they eat the lambs of the flock and the calves raised in the stable. They sing to the sound of the harp, as David improvises on musical instruments; they drink wine in large cups and are anointed with the most refined ointments, but of the ruin of Joseph – that is, of the poor, of the ruin of the people of Israel – they do not worry. Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the deportees and the orgy of the dissolute will cease. There is the orgy of the dissolute, there is the rich man and there is injustice towards the chosen people of the Lord, and here is the threat of the Lord Who punishes by sending into exile.

So far it seems to be only a moral teaching: please do justice to one another. But the most essential thing, the strongest, the key to understanding this is given by the initial prayer, the Collect prayer, which says: “O God, you call your poor by name, while the rich man has no name”. This is the problem. Both lead their lives, each one in the choice he has made of life. One has managed to have a name, to make a name for himself, to be called by name, with a noun; the other, the rich, we do not know what his name is – we have only the adjective, “rich”: he failed to develop a name, dignity before God. Life is played out: the coherence of having a name or the inconsistency that leads us to not having a name. The rich man knew that at the door of his house there was this poor man and pretended not to see him, because he looked only at himself, he focused on himself, on vanity, he believed himself to be the master of the universe, and worried about riches and the feasts and things he did. Did he not know what the poor man’s name was? Yes, he knew it, because when he was in hell he asked Abraham: “Send Lazarus”. The hypocrisy of vanity, the hypocrisy of those who believe they can be redeemers of themselves, to save themselves, only with things. But their names do not grow, they have no names, they are anonymous. Instead, in the Gospel text, five times the name of the poor man is said. Five times, an exaggeration, but why does Jesus do this? Because as the prayer says: “Lord, you call your poor by name, while the rich man has no name”. This is the story of this Gospel, the story of two paths of life: one that has managed to carry on his own name; and the other who, concerned about himself, about selfishness, is unable to make his personhood, his dignity grow. He has no name.

Our whole life is something of a path to consolidate, to strengthen our name with the honesty of life, with the path that the Lord points out to us, and for this we must help each other.

One might say to me: “Father, the Gospel is fine, but what does this have to do with the Gendarmerie today? You too must guard all the people who are here, who have the possibility of growing up, of having a name. You are men who work for the dignity of each one of us so that each one of us may have a name and carry on his own name, the name that the Lord wants us to carry. And when you carry out some disciplinary measure – “This cannot be done” – it is precisely to stop this orgy of anonymity that is the ugliest of human orgies: not to accept a name and to wish to return to the darkness of anonymity. That’s why it occurred to me that it can be said that the Gendarmerie is the custodian of the names, of all our names. Not to clean up each person’s file: if there is something bad, we burn it away... No, this “name” is not valid. But to help the discipline of the Vatican City State, to enable each of its inhabitants to have a name. And for that I thank you very much. Continue in this way, to work for the dignity of persons, of each one, and in this way you will continue your vocation.

Finally, I would like to say just one word about a sin that I have committed today, and to you who are policemen: today I have smuggled! I smuggled into this Mass a family of friends celebrating the 50th anniversary of their marriage, and I had this Mass and they wanted me to celebrate it for them and so I smuggled them here in this Mass with you. They are forty-six of them, they are there. The spouses, children and grandchildren. A total of forty-six. A lovely family! Pray for them too, that they may have a name. Thank you.
