



## The Holy See

---

*Beatitudes, venerable Cardinal Fathers, brothers and sisters,*

A few days ago, we prayed beside our Holy Father Francis, and over his body we proclaimed our unshakeable faith in the resurrection of the dead. In these days, our certainty and our invocation continue, so that the Lord may look with mercy on his faithful servant.

Indeed, resurrection, as the first reading reminds us, is not a phenomenon intrinsic to human nature. It is God who makes us rise again, through his Spirit. From the waters of Baptism we have emerged as new creatures, members of God's family, his intimates, or, as Saint Paul says, adoptive children and no longer slaves. And it is precisely because we are his children that in the same Spirit it is granted to us to cry out our invocation: "*Abbá, Father*". The whole of creation that, in its labour pains, awaits its healing, joins in this cry. Creation and the human person seem to have so little value. And yet among us there are Cardinals, such as those from Africa, who feel spontaneously the beauty of the fruit of all these pains, because a new life has an inestimable value for their people.

Then there emerges the theme of creation as a travelling companion for humanity, and in solidarity with it, just as it asks for solidarity with the human being, that it may be respected and healed. And this is a theme that was very dear to our Pope Francis.

All around us we can only hear the cry of creation, and in it, that of the one destined for glory and the purpose for which creation was intended: the human person. The earth cries out, but above all there is the cry of a humanity overwhelmed by hatred, itself the result of a profound devaluation of the value of life, which, as we Christians have heard, is participation in the family of God, even to the point of concorporeality and consanguinity with Christ the Lord, whom we are celebrating in this sacrament of the Eucharist.

Very often, this desperate humanity struggles to express, in its cry, its prayer and invocation of the God of life. And it is then, Saint Paul reminds us, that the spirit intervenes within us and makes our stony silences and our unwept tears an invocation to our God with inexpressible wails or, as it could also be translated, unexpressed – silent – groans. This is an expression very dear to the eastern Christian world, which sees in the incapacity to express God (*apophasis*) one of the

characteristics of theology: contemplation of the incomprehensible, the vain attempt to lift the veil from the ultimate truth and thus, at best, the possibility of saying, as Saint Thomas Aquinas would repeat in the West, not what God is, but what he is not.

Here is a great teaching for us, as often we feel we are the masters of God, the perfect knowers of the truth, whereas we are only pilgrims to whom the Word, which is the incarnate Son of God, has been given, because what has given us the gift of living in the glory of God is only the fruit of grace and of that infusion of the Holy Spirit that makes us, precisely, 'spiritual'. And in the East, the spiritual father and mother are the monk, nun or otherwise the guide of those who seek God. Even we in the West, significantly before we called these people spiritual 'directors', we called them spiritual fathers and mothers. An interesting change.

Here is a great lesson for us, who often feel that we are the masters of God, the perfect knowers of the truth, whereas we are only pilgrims to whom the Word, which is the incarnate Son of God, has been given, because what has given us the gift of living in the glory of God is only the fruit of grace and of that infusion of the Holy Spirit that makes us, indeed, "spiritual". And in the East, the spiritual father and mother are the monk, nun or otherwise the guide of those who seek God. Even we in the West, significantly before we called these people spiritual "directors", we called them spiritual fathers and mothers. An interesting change.

In this Eucharist, we intend to unite ourselves as we can and know how, even in our aridity, distractions, and continuous loss of focus on what is purely necessary, to the inexpressible groaning of the Spirit who cries out to God what is pleasing to him and what expresses in fullness the groaning of our nature, which we do not know how to formulate in words, also because we do not even allow ourselves, overwhelmed by haste, the time to know ourselves, to know him, to invoke him. Saint Augustine invites us to enter within ourselves, because it is there that we can find the authentic meaning that not only expresses what we are, but cries out to the Father our need to be beloved children, repeating: "*Abbá, Father*": "*Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*".

He who loves his life will lose it, the Gospel of John reminds us, and he who detests his own life will find it. In this extreme phrase the Lord expresses our specificity as Christians, considered by the world to be followers of a loser, of one defeated by life, who passes through death, and not through the building of an earthly kingdom, saved the world, and redeemed every one of us.

Pope Francis taught us to heed the cry of violated life, to take it on and present it to the Father, but also to work to alleviate in a concrete way the pain that elicits this cry, at every latitude and in the infinite ways in which evil weakens us and destroys us.

Today, the liturgy is animated and participated in by some of the Fathers and the sons and daughters of the eastern Catholic Churches, present together with us to bear witness to the wealth

of their experience of faith and the cry of their suffering, offered for the eternal repose of the late Pontiff.

Let us thank them for having accepted to enrich the catholicity of the Church with the variety of their experiences, their cultures, but above all their very rich spirituality. Children of the beginnings of Christianity, they have carried in their hearts, together with their Orthodox brothers and sisters, the flavour of the Lord's land, and some even continue to speak the language that Jesus Christ spoke.

Through the prodigious and painful developments of their history, they reached important dimensions and enriched the treasure of Christian theology with a contribution as original as it is, to a large extent, unknown to us in the West.

In the past, Eastern Catholics accepted full communion with the successor of the Apostle Peter whose body rests in this Basilica. And it was in the name of this union that they bore witness, often with blood or persecution, to their faith. In part now reduced, in numbers and strength but not in faith, by wars and intolerance, these brothers and sisters of ours cling firmly to a sense of catholicity that does not exclude, but rather implies, the recognition of their specificity.

In the course of history they were sometimes little understood by us Westerners, who, at certain times, judged them and decided what they, the descendants of apostles and martyrs, believed was or was not faithful to authentic theology (i.e. ours), while their Orthodox brethren, consanguineous and partakers of the same culture, liturgy and way of perceiving God's being and working, considered them runaways, lost to their own origin and assimilated into a world then considered mutually incompatible.

I believe that Pope Francis, who taught us to love diversity and the richness of expression of all that is human, today rejoices to see us together in prayer for him and for his intercession. And we once again commit ourselves, while many of them are forced to leave their ancient lands, which were the Holy Land, to save their lives and see a better world, to sensitize ourselves, as our Pope wished, to welcome them and help them in our lands to preserve the specificity of their Christian contribution, which is an integral part of our being the Catholic Church.

It has always been dear to the eyes and hearts of our brothers and sisters of the East to cherish the incredible paradox of the Christian event: on the one hand the misery of our being sinful, on the other the infinite mercy of God who has placed us beside his throne to share even his being, through what the great Bishop and Doctor Saint Athanasius, whom the Church remembers today, called "divinization".

Their liturgy is entirely interwoven with this wonder. And so, for example, in this liturgical time, the Byzantine tradition repeats this ineffable experience endlessly, saying, singing and communicating

to others: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death underfoot, and to the dead in the tombs he has bestowed life”. And they repeat it constantly, as if to make it enter their own and others’ hearts.

This same astonishment is also expressed in the Armenian liturgy, in praying with the words of that Saint Gregory of Narek whom Pope Francis himself wished to ascribe among the Doctors of the Church and whom tradition has made an integral part of the Eucharistic euchology: “We beseech you, Lord, may our sins be consumed by fire as those of the prophet were consumed by the burning coal offered to him with tongs, so that in all things your mercy may be proclaimed as the sweetness of the Father was proclaimed through the Son of God, who led the prodigal son back to his father’s inheritance and guided prostitutes to the blessedness of the righteous in the kingdom of heaven. Yes, I too am one of them: receive me too as one of them, as one in need of your great love for humanity, I who live by your graces”.

Here are just two examples of the vibrant force with which the emotion of the heart is mixed, in the east, with the lucidity of the mind to describe our immense poverty, saved by the infinity of God’s love.

Dear brother Cardinals, as the days in which we will be called to choose the new Pope draw ever closer, let us place on our lips the invocation of the Holy Spirit that a great Oriental father, Saint Simeon the New Theologian, wrote at the beginning of his hymns: “Come, true light; come, eternal life; come, hidden mystery; come, nameless treasure; come, ineffable reality; come, inconceivable person; come, endless happiness; come, light without setting; come, infallible expectation of all those who are to be saved. Come, thou who hast desired and desires my miserable soul. Come, thou, the one, to me, alone, for thou seest that I am alone; that, seeing thee eternally, I, dead, may live; possessing thee, I, poor, may ever be rich and richer than kings; I, eating and drinking of thee, and clothed in thee at all times, pass from delight to delight in the inexpressible good things, for thou art all good and all glory and all delight, and it is to thee that the glory belongs, O holy, consubstantial and life-giving Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (... ) now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen”.

---

*Holy See Press Office Bulletin*, 2 May 2025