



The Holy See

HOLY MASS WITH THE NEW CARDINALS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 23 February 2014

Video

“Merciful Father, by your help, may we be ever attentive to the voice of the Spirit” (*Opening Prayer*).

This prayer, the opening prayer of today’s Mass, reminds us of something fundamental: we are called to listen to the Holy Spirit who enlivens and guides the Church. By his creative and renewing power, the Spirit always sustains the hope of God’s People as we make our pilgrim way through history, and, as the Paraclete, he always supports the witness of Christians. In this moment, together with the new Cardinals, all of us want to listen to the voice of the Spirit as he speaks to us through the Scriptures we have just heard.

In the first reading, the Lord’s call to his people resounds: “You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy” (*Lev 19:2*). In the Gospel Jesus echoes this call: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Mt 5:48*). These words challenge all of us, as the Lord’s disciples. Today, they are especially addressed to me and to you, dear brother Cardinals, and in a particular way to those of you who yesterday entered the College. Imitating the holiness and perfection of God might seem an unattainable goal. Yet, the first reading and the Gospel offer us concrete examples which enable God’s way of acting to become the norm for our own. Yet we – all of us – must never forget that without the Holy Spirit our efforts are in vain! Christian holiness is not first and foremost our own work, but the fruit of docility – willed and cultivated – to the Spirit of God thrice holy.

The Book of Leviticus says: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart ... You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge ... but you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (*Lev 19:17-18*). These attitudes are born of the holiness of God. We, however, tend to be so different, so selfish and proud ... and yet, God’s goodness and beauty attract us, and the Holy Spirit is able to purify, transform and shape us day by day. To make effort to be converted, to experience a heartfelt conversion: this is something that all of us – especially you Cardinals and myself – must do. Conversion!

In the Gospel Jesus also speaks to us of holiness, and explains to us the new law, his law. He does this by contrasting the imperfect justice of the scribes and Pharisees with the higher justice of the Kingdom of God. The *first contrast* of today’s passage refers to revenge. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you ... if anyone should strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (*Mt 5:38-39*). We are required not only to avoid repaying others the evil they have done to us, but also to seek generously to do good to them.

The *second contrast* refers to our enemies: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (*Mt 5:43-44*). Jesus asks those who would follow him to love those who do not deserve it, without expecting anything in return, and in this way to fill the emptiness present in human hearts, relationships, families, communities and in the entire world. My brother Cardinals, Jesus did not come to teach us good manners, how to behave well at the table! To do that, he would not have had to come down from heaven and die on the Cross. Christ came to save us, to show us the way, the *only* way out of the quicksand of sin, and this way of holiness is mercy, that mercy which he has shown, and daily continues to show, to us. To be a saint is not a luxury. It is necessary for the salvation of the world. This is what the Lord is asking of us.

Dear brother Cardinals, the Lord Jesus and mother Church ask us to witness with greater zeal and ardour to these ways of being holy. It is exactly in this greater self-gift, freely offered, that the holiness of a Cardinal consists. We love, therefore, those who are hostile to us; we bless those who speak ill of us; we greet with a smile those who may not deserve it. We do not aim to assert ourselves; we oppose arrogance with meekness; we forget the humiliations that we have endured. May we always allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of Christ, who sacrificed himself on the Cross so that we could be “channels” through which his charity might flow. This is the attitude of a Cardinal, this must be how he acts. A Cardinal – I say this especially to you – enters the Church of Rome, my brothers, not a royal court. May all of us avoid, and help others to avoid, habits and ways of acting typical of a court: intrigue, gossip, cliques, favouritism and partiality. May our language be that of the Gospel: “yes when we mean yes; no when we mean no”; may our attitudes be those of the Beatitudes, and our way be that of holiness. Let pray once more: “Merciful Father, by your help, may we be ever attentive to the voice of the Spirit”

The Holy Spirit also speaks to us today through the words of Saint Paul: “You are God’s temple ...

God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 *Cor* 3:16-17). In this temple, which we are, an existential liturgy is being celebrated: that of goodness, forgiveness, service; in a word, the liturgy of love. This temple of ours is defiled if we neglect our duties towards our neighbour. Whenever the least of our brothers and sisters finds a place in our hearts, it is God himself who finds a place there. When that brother or sister is shut out, it is God himself who is not being welcomed. A heart without love is like a deconsecrated church, a building withdrawn from God's service and given over to another use.

Dear brother Cardinals, may we remain united in Christ and among ourselves! I ask you to remain close to me, with your prayers, your advice and your help. And I ask all of you, bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and laity, together to implore the Holy Spirit, that the College of Cardinals may always be ever more fervent in pastoral charity and filled with holiness, in order to serve the Gospel and to help the Church radiate Christ's love in our world.