



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE ECCLESIAL CONVENTION
OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 17 June 2013*

[Multimedia]

Good evening to you all, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Apostle Paul ended this passage of his Letter to our forebears with these words: you are no longer under law but under grace. And this is our life: walking under grace, because the Lord has loved us, has saved us, has forgiven us. The Lord has done all things and this is grace, God's grace. We are on our way under the grace of God who came down to us in Jesus Christ who saved us.

However this opens us toward a wide horizon and this is a joy to us. "You are not under law but under grace". What does this "living under grace mean?". It is our joy, it is our freedom. We are free. Why? because we live under grace. We are no longer slaves of the Law: we are free, because Jesus Christ liberated us, he gave us freedom, the full freedom of God's children, which we live under grace. This is a treasure. I shall try to explain something of this mystery, which is so beautiful and so important: living under grace.

This year you have worked both on Baptism and also on the renewal of your post-baptismal pastoral care. Baptism, this admittance to being "under law", "under grace" is a revolution. There have been so many revolutionaries in history, many indeed. Yet none of them have had the force of this revolution which brought Jesus to us: a revolution to transform history, a revolution that changes the human heart in depth. The revolutions of history have changed political and economic systems but none have really changed the human heart. True revolution, the revolution that

radically transforms life was brought about by Jesus Christ through his Resurrection. Moreover Benedict XVI said of this revolution that “it is the greatest mutation in the history of humanity”.

Let us think about this: it is the greatest mutation in humanity’s history, it is a true revolution, we are revolutionaries and what is more revolutionaries of this revolution. For we have taken this road of the greatest metamorphosis in humanity’s history. In this day and age unless Christians are revolutionaries they are not Christians. They must be revolutionaries through grace! Grace itself, which the Father gives us through the crucified, dead and risen Jesus Christ makes us revolutionaries because — and once again I cite Benedict XVI — “he is the greatest mutation in the history of humanity” because he changes the heart.

The Prophet Ezekiel said: “I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”.

This is the experience the Apostle Paul had after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It radically changed his outlook on life and he received Baptism. God transformed his heart! However, only think: a persecutor, a man who hounded out the Church and Christians, became a saint, a Christian to the marrow, a genuine Christian! First he was a violent persecutor, then he became an apostle, a witness of Jesus Christ so brave that he was not afraid of suffering martyrdom. In the end the Saul who wanted to kill those who proclaimed the Gospel gave his own life to proclaim it.

This is the mutation, the most important mutation of which Pope Benedict spoke to us. I change your heart, from that of a sinner — a sinner: we are all sinners — he transforms you into a saint. Is there any one of us who is not a sinner? If so, raise your hand! We are all sinners, each and every one. We are all sinners! But the grace of Jesus Christ saves us from sin: it saves us!

If we — all of us — accept the grace of Jesus Christ he changes our heart and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else, or have as it were the face on a holy card! No, no, that is not necessary. To become saints only one thing is necessary: to accept the grace which the Father gives us in Jesus Christ. There, this grace changes our heart. We continue to be sinners for we are weak, but with this grace which makes us feel that the Lord is good, that the Lord is merciful, that the Lord waits for us, that the Lord pardons us, this immense grace that changes our heart.

The Prophet Ezekiel said he would take out the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. What does this mean? A heart that loves, a heart that suffers, a heart that rejoices with others, a heart filled with tenderness for those scarred from the injuries of life, who feel they are on the fringes of society. Love is the greatest power for the transformation of reality because it pulls down the walls of selfishness and fills the ditches that keep us apart. This is the love that comes from a mutated heart, from a heart of stone that has been turned into a heart of flesh, a human heart. And

this is what grace does, the grace of Jesus Christ which we have all received. Is there any one of you who knows what grace costs? Where grace is sold? Where I can purchase grace? No one can answer: no. Do I go to buy it from the parish office, perhaps grace is sold there? Does some priest sell grace?

Listen to this carefully: grace is neither bought nor sold; it is a gift of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives us grace. He is the only one who gives us grace. It is a present: he is offering it to us, to us. Let us accept it. This is beautiful. Jesus' love is like this : he gives us grace freely, he freely gives it to us. and we must give it freely to our brother and sisters. It is a little sad when one meets some who sell grace: in the history of the Church this has sometimes happened, and it did such harm, such harm. However, grace cannot be sold: you receive it freely and give it freely. And this is the grace of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of so many sufferings, so many problems, as there are here in Rome, there are people who live without hope. Each one of us can think in silence of people who live with no hope and are steeped in profound sadness from which they struggle to emerge, believing they have found happiness in alcohol, in drugs, in gambling, in the power of money, in sexuality unbridled by rules.... However they find themselves even more disappointed and sometimes vent their rage against life with violent behaviour unworthy of the human being.

How many sad people, how many sad people without hope! Think too of the many young people who after trying out so many things, fail to find a meaning for life and opt for suicide as a solution. Do you know how many young people commit suicide in the world today? A large number. Why? They have no hope. They have tried so many things and society, which is cruel — it is cruel! — cannot give you hope. Hope is like grace: it cannot be bought, it is a gift of God. We must offer Christian hope with our witness, our freedom and our joy. The present offered by the God of grace gives hope.

Can we who have had the joy of knowing that we are not orphans, that we have a Father, be indifferent to this city which asks of us, perhaps even unwittingly, without being aware of it, a hope that will help it look to the future with greater confidence and serenity? We cannot remain indifferent. But how can we do this? How can we step forward and offer hope? By going on our way saying: "I have hope"? No! With your witness, with your smile, saying: "I believe I have a Father". This is what Gospel proclamation is: it is saying with my words, with my witness: "I have a Father. We are not orphans. We have a Father", and means sharing this sonship with the Father and with everyone else. "Father, now I understand: it is a question of convincing others, of proselytizing!". No: it is nothing of the kind. The Gospel is like seed: you scatter it, you scatter it with your words and with your witness. and then it is not you who calculate the statistics of the results; it is God who does. It is he who makes this seed germinate but we must sow it with the certainty that he will water it, that he gives the growth. And we do not gather in the harvest. Some other priest will do this, some other lay person, a man or woman, someone else will do it. However

the joy of sowing with our witness — for with words alone it is not enough, it is not enough. Words without witness are hot air. Words do not suffice. It must be the true witness that Paul speaks of.

The proclamation of the Gospel is destined for the poor first of all, for all those all who all too often lack what they need in to live a dignified life. To them first are proclaimed the glad tidings that God loves them with a preferential love and comes to visit them through the charitable works that disciples of Christ do in his name. Go to the poor first of all: this is the priority. At the moment of the Last Judgement, as we can read in Matthew 25, we shall all be judged on this. Some, however, may think that Jesus' message is for those who have no cultural background. No! No! The Apostle affirms forcefully that the Gospel is for everyone, even the learned. The wisdom that comes from the resurrection is not in opposition to human wisdom but on the contrary purifies and uplifts it. The Church has always been present in places where culture is worked out. But the first step is always the priority for the poor. Nevertheless we must also reach the frontiers of the intellect, of culture, of the loftiness of dialogue, of the dialogue that makes peace, the intellectual dialogue, the reasonable dialogue.

The Gospel is for everyone! This reaching out to the poor does not mean we must become champions of poverty or, as it were, "spiritual tramps"! No, no this is not what it means! It means we must reach out to the flesh of Jesus that is suffering, but also suffering is the flesh of Jesus of those who do not know it with their study, with their intelligence, with their culture. We must go there! I therefore like using the expression "to go toward the outskirts", the outskirts of existence. All all the outskirts?, from physical and real poverty to intellectual poverty, which is also real. All the peripheries, all the crossroads on the way: go there. And sow there the seed of the Gospel with your words and your witness.

This means we must have courage. Paul VI used to say that he did not understand disheartened Christians, he simply did not understand them: those sad and anxious Christians who make one wonder whether they believe in God or in "the goddess of complaint". One never knows. Day in day out they complain, they moan; and see how the world is going, look what disasters, what disasters. But think: the world is no worse than it was five centuries ago! The world is the world; it always was the world. And when someone complains: and it goes on like this, nothing can be done, O dear, young people! I shall ask you a question. Do you know Christians of this kind? There are some, there are some! However, Christians must be brave. In facing a problem, in facing a social or religious crisis they must have the courage to move onwards, to go ahead bravely. And when nothing can be done, patiently: putting up with it. Tolerating. Courage and patience, these two virtues of Paul. Courage: moving ahead, bearing a forceful witness: onwards! Putting up with things: bearing on our shoulders the things that cannot yet be changed. but moving forward with this patience, with this patience that grace gives us.

However what must we do with courage and with patience? Come out of ourselves, step out of ourselves. Go out of our communities to go where men and women live in order to work and suffer

and proclaim to them the mercy of the Father who made men and women acquainted with him in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Proclaim this grace that was given to us by Jesus.

If I asked priests on Holy Thursday to be shepherds with the smell of their sheep, I say to you, dear brothers and sisters: be everywhere heralds of the word of life in our neighbourhoods, our workplaces and everywhere that people meet one another and develop relationships. You must go outside. I do not understand Christian communities that are shut into a parish.

I want to tell you something. There is a beautiful passage of the Gospel which tells us about the shepherd who, when he returned to the sheepfold realized that one sheep was missing. He left the 99 others and went in search of it, he went off to look for one. But brothers and sisters, we have one sheep. We have lost the other 99! We must go out, we must go out to them! In this culture — let us tell the truth — we only have one, we are a minority! And do we feel the fervour, the apostolic zeal to go out and find the other 99? This is an enormous responsibility and we must ask the Lord for the grace of generosity, and the courage and patience to go out, to go out and preach the Gospel. Ah, this is difficult. It is easier to stay at home, with that one sheep! It is easier with that sheep to comb its fleece, to stroke it... but we priests and you Christians too, everyone: the Lord wants us to be shepherds, he does not want us to fuss with combing fleeces! Shepherds! And when a community is withdrawn, always among the same people who speak, this community is not a life-giving community. It is barren, it is not fertile. The fecundity of the Gospel comes through the grace of Jesus Christ, but through us, our preaching, our courage, our patience.

The whole thing is a little long, isn't it? But it is not easy! We must tell each other the truth: the work of evangelizing, of freely carrying grace ahead, is not easy, because we are not alone with Jesus Christ; there is also an adversary, an enemy who wants to keep men and women separate from God and for this reason instils in hearts disappointment when we do not see our apostolic commitment immediately rewarded. Every day the Devil scatters in our hearts seeds of pessimism and gall, and it is discouraging, we become discouraged. "It's no good! We've done this, that and the other and it's no good! And look how that religion attracts people whereas we don't!". It is the Devil who inspires this. We must prepare ourselves for the spiritual combat. This is important. It is impossible to preach the Gospel without this spiritual battle, a daily battle against sadness, against bitterness, against pessimism; a daily battle! Sowing is far from easy. Reaping is lovely but sowing is difficult and the daily battle of Christians consists in this.

Paul said he felt urgently impelled to preach and had had the experience of this spiritual fight, when he told us: "I have a thorn of Satan in my flesh and I feel it every day". We too have thorns of Satan that hurt us, that impede our progress and very often discourage us. Let us prepare ourselves for the spiritual combat: evangelization asks true courage of us partly because this inner fight, this battle in our hearts, so speak with prayer, with mortification, with the desire to follow Jesus, with the sacraments that are an encounter with Jesus, that are speaking to Jesus: thank you, thank you for your grace. I want to bring it to others. but this is work: this is work. It is called

— do not be shocked — *martyrdom*. This is martyrdom: fighting every day, in order to bear witness. This is what martyrdom is; and the Lord also asks of some people the martyrdom of life, but there is everyday martyrdom, at every moment: testimony against the spirit of evil which does not want us to be evangelizers.

I would now like to conclude with one thing in mind. In this epoch, when gratuitousness seems enfeebled in personal relationships because everything is bought and sold and gratuitousness is hard to find, let us Christians proclaim a God who to be our friend asks nothing other than to be accepted. The only thing that Jesus asks for: to be made welcome. Let us think of all who live in desperation because they have never met anyone who showed them attention or comforted them, anyone who made them feel precious and important. Can we, disciples of the Crucified One, refuse to go to those places where no one wants to go, for fear of compromising ourselves or of the opinion of others, and hence deny these brethren of ours the proclamation of God's word? Gratuitousness! We have received this gratuitousness, this grace, freely; we must give it freely. And this is what, in the end, I want to tell you. Do not be afraid, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid of love, of the love of God our Father. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to receive the grace of Jesus Christ, do not be afraid of our freedom which is given by the grace of Jesus Christ or, as Paul used to say: "you are not under law but under grace". Do not be afraid of grace, do not be afraid of going out of our Christian communities to seek and find the 99 who are not at home. And go and talk to them, and tell them what we think, go and show them our love, which is the love of God.

Dear brothers and sisters: do not be afraid! Let us keep going, to tell our brothers and sisters that we are under grace, that Jesus gives us grace and that this costs nothing: only, accept it. Onwards!