



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO ECUADOR, BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY

(5-13 JULY 2015)

**VESPERS WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, DEACONS,
MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS, SEMINARIANS AND CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS**

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption, Asunción, Paraguay

Saturday, 11 July 2015

[Multimedia]

How good it is for all of us to pray Vespers together! How can we not dream of of a Church which reflects and echoes the harmony of voices and song in her daily life! That is what we are doing in this Cathedral, rebuilt so many times over the years. This Cathedral symbolizes the Church and each one of us. At times, storms from without and within force us to tear down what had been built and to begin again, but always with the hope given us by God. And when we look at this building, we can surely say that it has not disappointed the hopes of the Paraguayan people... because God never disappoints! For this we give thankful praise.

Liturgical prayer, in its unhurried structure, is meant to be an expression of the whole Church, the Spouse of Christ, as she strives to be ever more conformed to her Lord. Each one of us, in prayer, wants to become more like Jesus.

Prayer expresses what we experience and what we ought to experience in our daily lives. At least that is true of prayer that is not self-centered or merely for show. Prayer makes us put into practice, or examine our consciences about, what we have prayed for in the Psalms. We are the hands of the God who "lifts up the poor from the dust" (Ps 112:7). We work to turn what is dry and barren into the joy of fertile ground. We cry out that "precious in the eyes of the Lord is the life of his faithful ones". We are those who fight, speak up and defend the dignity of every human life, from conception to old age, when our years are many and our strength fails. Prayer is the

reflection of our love for God, for others and for all creation. The commandment of love is the greatest way for the missionary disciple to be conformed to Jesus. Union with Jesus deepens our Christian vocation, which is concerned with what Jesus “does” – which is something much greater than mere “activities” – with becoming more like him in all that we do. The beauty of the ecclesial community is born of this union of each of her members to the person of Jesus, creating an “ensemble of vocations” in the richness of harmonic diversity.

The antiphons of the Gospel canticles for this weekend evoke for us the sending of the Twelve by Jesus. It is always good to grow in this awareness that apostolic work is carried out in communion! It is admirable to see you cooperating pastorally, with respect for the nature and ecclesial role of each of the vocations and charisms. I want to encourage all of you, priests, men and women religious, laity and seminarians, bishops, to be committed to this ecclesial collaboration, especially with regard to diocesan pastoral plans and the continental mission, and to work together with complete availability in the service of the common good. If our divisions lead to barrenness (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 98-101), then there is no doubt that communion and harmony lead to fruitfulness, because they are deeply attuned to the Holy Spirit.

Each of us has his or her limitations, and no one is able to reproduce Jesus in all his fullness. Although all vocations are associated with certain aspects of the life and work of Jesus, some vocations are more general and essential. Just now we praised the Lord for “he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (*Phil 2:6*). This is the case with every Christian vocation, not regarding “equality with God as something to be exploited”. A person called by God does not show off; he or she does not seek recognition or applause; he or she does not claim to be better than others, standing apart as if on a pedestal.

Christ’s supremacy is clearly described in the liturgy of the Letter to the Hebrews. As we just read from the final part of that Letter, we are to become perfect like “the great Shepherd of the sheep”. And this means that all consecrated persons are to be conformed to Jesus, who in his earthly life, “with prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” achieved perfection when, through suffering, he learned the meaning of obedience. This too is part of the calling.

Let us conclude our celebration of Vespers. The bell tower of this Cathedral was rebuilt a number of times. The sound of its bells anticipates and accompanies our liturgical prayer on so many occasions. Rebuilt for God whenever we pray, steadfast like a bell tower, joyful in preaching the wonders of God, let us share the Magnificat and, through our consecrated life, allow the Lord to accomplish great things in Paraguay.

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