



The Holy See

THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

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[Multimedia]

In the First Reading we enter into the tenderness of God: God tells his people how much he loves them, how much he cares for them. What God says to his people, in this Reading from the Prophet Hosea, chapter 11, he says to each one of us. And it would be good to take this text, in a moment of solitude, and set ourselves in the presence of God and listen: “When you were a child, I loved you; I loved you as a child; I saved you; I led you out of Egypt, I saved you from slavery”, from the slavery of sin, from the slavery of self-destruction and from every kind of slavery that each of us knows, has had and has within. “I saved you. I taught you how to walk”. How beautiful to hear that God teaches me to walk! The Almighty abases himself and teaches me how to walk. I recall this phrase from Deuteronomy, when Moses says to his people: “Listen you,” — they were so hard-headed — “when have you ever seen a god so close to his people as God is close to us?”. And the closeness of God is tenderness like this: he has taught me how to walk. Without Him I wouldn’t know how to walk in the Spirit. “And I held you by the hand. But you did not understand that I was leading you, you believed that I would leave you alone”. This is the story of each one of us. “I held you with human bonds, not punitive laws”. With bonds of love, ties of love. Love binds, but binds in freedom; it binds while leaving you the space to respond with love. “I was for you as one who raises a child up to his cheek and kisses her. And I bent down and fed her”. This is our history, at least it is my history. Each of us can read her own history here. “Tell me, how can I abandon you now? How can I hand you over to the enemy?”. In the moments when we are afraid, at the times that we are uncertain, He says to us: “If I did this for you, how can you think I would leave you alone, that I could abandon you?”. On the shores of Libya, the 23 Coptic martyrs were

certain that God would not abandon them. And they were beheaded proclaiming the name of Jesus! They knew that God, as their head was cut off, would not abandon them.

“How can I treat you as an enemy? My heart recoils within me and my compassion grows warm and tender”. God’s compassion is kindled, this warm compassion: He alone is capable of warm compassion. I will not unleash my anger for the sins that exist, for all these misunderstandings, for the fact of idol worship. Because I am God, I am the Holy One in your midst. It is the declaration of a father’s love to his child. And to each one of us.

How often do I think that we are afraid of the tenderness of God and because we are afraid of God’s tenderness, we do not allow it to be felt within us. Because of this we are so often hard, serious, punishing.... We are pastors without compassion. What does Jesus say to us in Luke at Chapter 15? About that shepherd who noticed that he had 99 sheep for one was missing. He left them well safeguarded, locked away, and went to search for the other, who was ensnared in thorns.... And he didn’t beat it, didn’t scold it: he took it tightly in his arms and cared for it, for it was injured. Do you do the same with your faithful? When you realize that one of your flock is missing? Or are we accustomed to being a Church which has a single sheep in her flock and we let the other 99 get lost on the hill? Are you moved by all this compassion? Are you a shepherd of sheep or have you become one who is “grooming” the one remaining sheep? Because you seek only yourself and you have forgotten about the tenderness your Father gave you, and it is recounted to you here, in Chapter 11 of Hosea. And you have forgotten how to give that compassion. The Heart of Christ is the tenderness of God. “How could I fail you? How could I abandon you? When you are alone, disoriented, lost, come to me, and I will save you, I will comfort you”.

Today, I ask you, in this retreat, to be pastors with the compassion of God. To leave the “whip” hanging in the sacristy and to be pastors with tenderness, also with those who create many problems. It is a grace. It is a divine grace, We do not believe in an ethereal God, we believe in a God who became flesh, who has a heart and this heart today speaks to us thus: “Come to me. If you are tired, oppressed and I will give you rest. But the smallest, treat them with compassion, with the same tenderness with which I treat you”. The Heart of Jesus Christ says this to us today, and it is what I ask in this Mass for you, and also for me.