



The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO CASERTA

MEETING WITH THE CLERGY

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Palatine Chapel in the Royal Palace of Caserta

Saturday, 26 July 2014

Your Holiness, I did not prepare a written text because I immediately realized that you want a deep and intimate relationship with the priests. So I say to you “welcome”. This is our Church, the priests, and then we will see the rest of the Church, as we celebrate the Eucharist. For me, this moment is important, because I have been here for only two months, and to begin this episcopate with Your presence and Your blessing is for me a grace within the grace. And now we await your words. Knowing that you would like to converse with the priests, they have also prepared some questions for you.

The Holy Father then thanked the Bishop and asked those present to formulate their questions.

I prepared a speech but I will give it to the Bishop. Thank you very much for the welcome. Thank you. I am happy and I feel a little guilty for having caused so many problems on the day of the patron’s feast. But I did not know. And when I called the Bishop to tell him that I wanted to come and make a private visit here to a friend, Pastor Traettino, he said to me: “Ah, right on the patron saint’s day!”. And I immediately thought: “In the newspapers the next day it will read: ‘on the patron feast of Caserta, Pope visits Protestants!’”. Nice headline, eh? And, in this way, we organized the visit, a little rushed, but the Bishop helped me a lot as did the people at the Secretariat of State. I told the Substitute when I called him: “Please cut the cord from around my neck”. He did so nicely. Thank you for the questions you will ask. We can begin; ask the questions

and I will see if we can combine two or three, otherwise, I will respond to each one.

Your Holiness, thank you. I am the vicar general of Caserta, Fr Pasquariello. A huge thank-you for your visit to Caserta. I would like to ask a question: the good that you are bringing into the Catholic Church, with your daily homilies, official documents, especially Evangelii Gaudium, focus mainly on spiritual, intimate, personal conversion. It is a reform that engages, in my humble opinion, only the sphere of theology, biblical exegesis and philosophy. Alongside this personal conversion, which is essential for eternal salvation, I would see as useful some intervention, on the part of Your Holiness, which could get the People of God more involved, precisely as people. Let me explain. Our diocese, for 900 years, has had absurd boundaries: some municipalities are divided in half between the dioceses of Capua and Acerra. In fact, the station of the city of Caserta, less than one kilometre away from City Hall, belongs to Capua. For this reason, Most Blessed Father, I ask for a decisive action so that our communities no longer have to suffer unnecessary travel and so that the pastoral unity of our faithful is no longer sacrificed. It is clear, Your Holiness, that in Evangelii Gaudium, n. 10, you say that these things belong to the episcopate. But I remember that as a young priest — 47 years ago — we went with Msgr Roberti — he had come from the Secretariat of State — and we had brought a few problems even there; they said, after having explained things: “Come to an agreement with the bishops and we will sign”. And this is a beautiful thing. But when will the bishops come to an agreement?

Some Church historians say that in some of the first Councils, the Bishops would get to the point of punches but then they would come to an agreement. And this is a bad sign. It is bad when Bishops speak against each other or are roped in. I don't mean unity of thought or unity of spirituality, because this is good, I say roped in in the negative sense. This is bad because it breaks the unity of the Church. This is not of God. And we Bishops need to give the example of unity that Jesus asks of the Father for the Church. But we cannot go about speaking against one another: “And he does it this way and he does it that way...”. Go on, say it to the person's face! Our ancestors at the first Councils got to the point of punches and I prefer that they yell a few strong words to each other and then embrace, rather than speak against each other in hiding. This, as a general principle, namely: in the unity of the Church, unity among Bishops is important. You underlined the path that the Lord wanted for his Church. And this unity between Bishops is that which favours coming to an agreement on this or that issue. In one country — not in Italy, another place — there is a diocese whose boundaries have been reconfigured but motivated by the location of the cathedral's treasure, they have been discussed in court for more than 40 years. For money: this is not understandable! This is where the devil rejoices! It is he who profits. It is nice then that you say the Bishops must always be in agreement: but agreement in unity, not in uniformity. Each person has his charism; each person has his way of thinking, of seeing things: this variety is sometimes the fruit of mistakes, but many times it is the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit wanted this variety of charisms to exist in the Church. The same Spirit that creates diversity then succeeds to create unity; unity in the diversity of each one, without each one losing his own personality. But, I hope that what you said will move ahead. And then, we are all good, because

we all have the water of Baptism, we have the Holy Spirit within, who helps us to move ahead.

I am Fr Angelo Piscopo, parish priest of San Pietro Apostolo and San Pietro in Cattedra. My question is this: Your Holiness, in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, you invited us to encourage and to reinforce popular piety, as the precious treasure of the Catholic Church. At the same time, however, you showed the risk — unfortunately, ever more real — of the diffusion of an individualistic and sentimental Christianity, more attentive to traditional forms and to revelation, deprived of the fundamental aspects of the faith and irrelevant to social life. What suggestion can you give us for a ministry that, without devaluing popular piety, can re-launch the primacy of the Gospel? Thank you, Your Holiness.

We hear that this is a time where religiosity has declined, but I do not believe so. Because there are these currents, these schools of intimist religiosity, like the gnostics, who have an approach similar to pre-Christian prayer, pre-biblical prayer, gnostic prayer, and gnosticism entered into the Church in these groups of intimist piety: I call this “intimism”. “Intimism” is not good. It is something for me; I am calm; I feel full of God. It is a bit — it is not the same — but it is similar to *New Age*. There is religiosity, yes, but a pagan religiosity, even heretical. We must not be afraid to pronounce this word because gnosticism is a heresy. It was the Church’s first heresy. When I speak of religiosity, I speak of that treasure of piety, with many values, which the great Paul VI describes in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Think of this: the *Document of Aparecida*, which was the document of the Fifth Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, in order to summarize at the end of the document, in the penultimate paragraph — because the last two were credits and prayers — had to go back 40 years and extract a piece from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which is the post-Conciliar pastoral document that has yet to be surpassed. It is of great currency. In that document, Paul VI describes popular piety, affirming that sometimes it needs to be evangelized. Yes, because like every piety, it risks going a little this way and a little that way or not having an expression of strong faith. But the piety that people have, the piety that enters into the heart through Baptism has enormous strength, to the point that the People of God who have this piety, on the whole, can do no wrong. It is infallible *in credendo*: as said in *Lumen Gentium*, n. 12. True popular piety is born from that *sensus fidei* of which this conciliar document speaks and it guides in the devotion to the Saints, to Our Lady, even with folk expressions in the good sense of the word. For this, popular piety is fundamentally enculturated. It cannot be a popular piety created in a laboratory, ascetic, but always born from our lives. Small mistakes can be made — therefore we must be vigilant — however, popular religiosity is a tool of evangelization. Let us think of today’s young people. Young people — at least the experience I had in the other diocese — young people, youth movements in Buenos Aires did not work. Why? One would say to them: let’s organize a meeting to talk... and in the end the young people got bored. But when pastors found a way to involve young people in small missions, to do a mission during vacation time, to give catechesis to people who needed it, in the small villages where there are no priests, then they adhered. Young people truly want this missionary role and they learn from it to live a form of piety that we can even say is popular piety: the missionary apostolate of young people has something of

popular piety in it. Popular piety is active, it is a sense of faith — says Paul VI — deep, which only the simple and the humble are able to have. And this is great! In Shrines, for example, we see miracles! Every 27 July, I would go to the St Pantaleon Shrine in Buenos Aires and I would listen to confessions in the morning. I would return renewed from that experience, I would return shamed by the holiness I would find in simple people, sinners but holy, because they would tell of their sins and recount how they lived, the problem of their son or their daughter or of this or the other, and how they would visit the sick. You could feel the Gospel. In Shrines, you find these things. The confessionals of Shrines are a place of renewal for us priests and Bishops; they are a course in spiritual renewal because of this contact with popular piety. And the faithful, when they come to confess, they tell you their miseries, but you see behind those miseries the grace of God that guides them to this moment. This contact with the People of God who pray, a pilgrim people, who manifest their faith in this form of piety, helps us a lot in our priestly life.

Allow me to call you father Francis because fatherhood inevitably implies holiness when it is authentic. As a pupil of the Jesuit fathers, to whom I owe my cultural and priestly formation, I will first share my thoughts and then ask a question that I will put to you in a special way. The identikit of the priest of the third millennium: human and spiritual balance; missionary consciousness; openness to dialogue with other faiths, religious and non. Why this? You certainly have brought about a Copernican revolution in terms of language, lifestyle, behaviour and witness on the most considerable issues at a global level, even with atheists and with those who are far from the Catholic Christian Church. The question I ask you: how is it possible in this society, with a Church that hopes for growth and development, in this society with an evolution that is dynamic and conflictual and very often distant from the values of the Gospel of Christ, that we are a Church that is very often late? Your linguistic, semantic, cultural revolution, your evangelical witness is stirring an existential crisis for us priests. What imaginative and creative ways do you suggest for us to use in order to overcome or at least to alleviate this crisis that we perceive? Thank you.

So. How is it possible, with the Church growing and developing, to move forward? You said a few things: balance, openness to dialogue.... But, how can one go forward? You said a word that I really like. It is a divine word. If it is human it is because it is a gift of God: *creativity*. It is the commandment God gave to Adam, “Go and multiply. Be *creative*”. It is also the commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples, through the Holy Spirit, for example, the creativity of the early Church in her relationship with Judaism: Paul was creative; Peter, that day when he went to Cornelius, was afraid of them, because he was doing something new, something creative. But he went there. Creativity is the word. And how can you find this creativity? First of all — and this is the condition if we want to be creative *in the Spirit*, that is to say in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus — there is no other way than prayer. A Bishop who does not pray, a priest who does not pray has closed the door, has closed the path of creativity. It is precisely in prayer, when the Spirit makes you feel something, the devil comes and makes you feel another; but prayer is the condition for moving forward. Even if prayer can often seem boring. Prayer is so important. Not only the prayer of the Divine Office, but the liturgy of the Mass, quiet, celebrated well with devotion, personal prayer with

the Lord.

If we do not pray, perhaps we will be good pastoral and spiritual entrepreneurs, but the Church without prayer becomes an NGO, she does not have that *unctio Sancti Spiritu*. Prayer is the first step, because one must open oneself to the Lord to be able to be open to others. It is the Lord that says, “Go here, go there, do this...”, you will be inspired by the creativity that was very costly for many saints. Think of Blessed Antonio Rosmini, who wrote *The Five Wounds of the Church*, he was really a creative critic because he prayed. He wrote that which the Spirit made him feel. For this, he entered a spiritual prison, that is, in his home: he could not speak, he could not teach, he could not write, his books were placed on the Index. Today, he is Blessed! Many times creativity brings you to the cross. But when it comes from prayer, it bears fruit. Not creativity that is a little *sans façon* and revolutionary, because today it is fashionable to be a revolutionary; no, this is not of the Spirit. But when creativity comes from the Spirit and is born in prayer it can bring you problems. Creativity that comes from prayer has an anthropological dimension of transcendence, because through prayer you open yourself to transcendence, to God.

But there is also another transcendence: opening oneself up to others, to one’s neighbour. We must not be a Church closed in on herself, which watches her navel, a self-referential Church, who looks at herself and is unable to transcend. Twofold transcendence is important: toward God and toward one’s neighbour. Coming out of oneself is not an adventure; it is a journey, it is the path that God has indicated to men, to the people from the first moment when he said to Abraham, “Go from your country”. He had to go out of himself. And when I come out of myself, I meet God and I meet others. How do you meet others? From a distance or up close? You must meet them up close, closeness. Creativity, transcendence and closeness. Closeness is a key word: be near. Do not be afraid of anything. Be close. The man of God is not afraid. Paul himself, when he saw the many idols in Athens, was not afraid. He said to the people: “You are religious, many idols ... but, I will speak to you about another”. He did not get scared and he got close to them. He also cited their poets: “As your poets say...”. It’s about closeness to a culture, closeness to the people, to their way of thinking, their sorrows, their resentments. Many times this closeness is just a penance, because we need to listen to boring things, to offensive things.

Two years ago, a priest who went to Argentina as a missionary — he was from the Diocese of Buenos Aires and went to a diocese in the south, to an area where for years they had no priest, and the evangelicals had arrived — told me that he went to a woman who had been the teacher of the people and then the principle of the village school. This lady sat him down and began insulting him, not with bad words, but insulting him forcefully: “You abandoned us, you left us alone, and I, who need the Word of God, had to go to Protestant worship and I became a Protestant”. This young priest, who is meek, who is one who prays, when the woman finished her discourse, said: “Madam, just one word: forgiveness. Forgive us, forgive us. We abandoned the flock”. And the woman’s tone changed. However, she remained Protestant and the priest did not go into the subject of which was the true religion. In that moment, this could not be done. In the end, the lady

began to smile and said: “Father, would you like some coffee?” — “Yes, let’s have a coffee”. And when the priest was about to leave, she said: “Stop, Father. Come”. And she led him into the bedroom, she opened the closet and there was the image of Our Lady: “You must know that I never abandoned her. I hid her because of the pastor, but she’s in the home”. It is a story that teaches how proximity, meekness brought about this woman’s reconciliation with the Church, because she felt abandoned by the Church. And I asked a question that you must never ask: “And then, how did things turn out? How did it end?”. But the priest corrected me: “Oh, no, I did not ask anything: she continues to go to Protestant worship, but you can see that she is a woman who prays. The Lord Jesus provides”. And he did not go beyond that, and he did not urge her to return to the Catholic Church. It is that prudent closeness, which knows just how far one can reach. But, closeness also means dialogue; you must read in *Ecclesiam Suam*, the doctrine on dialogue, later repeated by other Popes. Dialogue is so important, but to dialogue two things are necessary: one’s identity as a starting point and empathy toward others. If I am not sure of my identity and I go to speak, I end up bartering my faith. You cannot dialogue without starting from your own identity, and empathy, which is *a priori* not condemning. Every man, every woman has something of their own to give us; every man, every woman has their own story, their own situation and we have to listen to it. Then the prudence of the Holy Spirit will tell us how to respond. Start from your own identity in order to dialogue, but a dialogue is not doing apologetics, although sometimes you must do so, when we are asked questions that require an explanation. Dialogue is a human thing. It is hearts and souls that dialogue, and this is so important! Do not be afraid to dialogue with anyone. It was said of a saint, joking somewhat — I do not remember, I think it was St Philip Neri, but I’m not sure — that he was able to dialogue even with the devil. Why? Because he had that freedom to listen to all people, but starting from his own identity. He was so sure, but being sure of one’s identity does not mean proselytizing. Proselytism is a trap, which even Jesus condemns a little, *en passant*, when he speaks to the Pharisees and the Sadducees: “You who go around the world to find a proselyte and then you remember that...”. But, it’s a trap. And Pope Benedict has a beautiful expression. He said it in Aparecida but I believe he repeated it elsewhere: “The Church grows not by proselytism, but by attraction”. And what’s the attraction? It is this human empathy, which is then guided by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, what will be the profile of the priest of this century, which is so secularized? A man of creativity, who follows God’s commandment — “to create things”; a man of transcendence, both with God in prayer and with others always; a man who is approachable and who is close to the people. To distance people is not priestly and people are tired of this attitude, and yet they still come to us. But he who welcomes the people and is close to them and dialogues with them does so because he feels certain of his identity, which leads him to have a heart open to empathy. This is what comes to me in response to your question.

Dear Father, my question is about the place where we live: the diocese, with our bishops, our relationships with our brothers and sisters. And I ask you: this historic time in which we are living has expectations of us as priests, that is of a clear, open, and joyful witness — as you are inviting us to be – in the newness of the Holy Spirit. I ask you: what would really be, in your opinion, the

specific foundation of the diocesan priest's spirituality? I think I read somewhere that you say: "The priest is not a contemplative". But it was not like that before. So, if you could give us an icon that we can refer to for the rebirth, the communal growth of our diocese. And above all, I'm interested in how we can be faithful, today, to man, not so much to God.

Here, you said "the newness of the Holy Spirit". It's true. But God is a God of surprises. He always surprises us, always, always. We read the Gospel and we find one surprise after another. Jesus surprises us because he arrives before us: He waits for us first, he loves us first, when we seek Him, he is already looking for us. As the prophet Isaiah or Jeremiah says, I do not remember well: God is like the flower of the almond tree, the first to blossom in spring. He is first, always first, always waiting for us. And this is the surprise. So many times we seek God here and He waits for us there. And then we come to the spirituality of the diocesan clergy. A contemplative priest, but not like one who is in a Carthusian monastery, I do not mean this contemplativeness. The priest must have contemplativeness, an ability to contemplate both God and people. He is a man who looks, who fills his eyes and his heart with this contemplation: with the Gospel before God, and with human problems before men. In this sense, he must be a contemplative. One should not get confused: the monk is something else. But where is the focal point of the spirituality of the diocesan priest? I would say it is in diocesan life. It is having the ability to open oneself to diocesan life. The spirituality of a religious person, for example, is the ability to open up to God and to others in the community: be it the smallest or the largest congregation. Instead, the spirituality of the diocesan priest is to be open to diocesan life. And you religious who work in the parish need to do both things, which is why the dicastery for Bishops and the dicastery for consecrated life are working on a new version of *Mutuae relationes*, because the religious has the two affiliations. Let us return to "diocesan life": what does it mean? It means having a relationship with the Bishop and a relationship with the other priests. The relationship with the Bishop is important, it is necessary. A diocesan priest cannot be separated from the Bishop. "But the Bishop does not care for me, the Bishop here, the Bishop there...": The Bishop may perhaps be a man with a bad temper, but he's your Bishop. And you have to find, even in that non-positive attitude, a way to maintain a relationship with him. This, however, is the exception. I am a diocesan priest because I have a relationship with the Bishop, a necessary relationship. It is really significant when, during the rite of ordination, one makes the vow of obedience to the Bishop. "I pledge obedience to you and your successors". Diocesan life means a relationship with the Bishop, which must be realized and must grow continuously. In the majority of cases it is not a catastrophic problem, but a normal reality. Secondly, the diocesan life involves a relationship with the other priests, with all the presbytery. There is no spirituality of the diocesan priest without these two relationships: with the Bishop and with the presbytery. And they are needed. "I, yes, get along well with the Bishop, but I do not attend the clergy meetings because they make small talk". With this attitude, you are missing out on something: you do not have that true spirituality of the diocesan priest. That's it: it is simple, but at the same time it is not easy. It is not easy because reaching an agreement with the Bishop is not always easy, because one thinks in one way the other thinks in another way. You can discuss and discuss! And can it be done in a loud voice? It can! How many times does a son argue with

his father and, in the end, they always remain father and son.

However, when in these two relationships, both with the Bishop and with the presbytery, diplomacy enters, the Spirit of the Lord is not there, because the spirit of freedom is lacking. We must have the courage to say, "I do not think of it that way; I think of it differently", and also the humility to accept a correction. It's very important. And what is the greatest enemy of these two relationships? Gossip. Many times I think — because I too have this urge to gossip, we have it inside us, the devil knows that this seed bears fruit and he sows it well — I think it is a consequence of a celibate life lived as sterility, not as fruitfulness. A lonely man ends up embittered, he is not fruitful and gossips about others. This is not good, this is precisely what prevents an evangelical, spiritual and fruitful relationship with the Bishop and the presbytery. Gossip is the strongest enemy of diocesan life, that is, of spirituality. But you are a man. Therefore, if you have something against the Bishop, go and tell him. But then there will be consequences. You will carry the cross, but be a man! If you are a mature man and you see something in your brother priest that you do not like or that you believe to be wrong, go and tell him to his face. Or if you see that he does not tolerate being corrected, go tell the Bishop or that priest's closest friend, so that he may help him correct himself. But do not tell others, because that's getting each other dirty. And the devil is happy with that "banquet" because that way he attacks the very centre of the spirituality of the diocesan clergy. For me, gossip does so much damage. And I am not some post-Conciliar novelty.... St Paul already had to deal with this. Remember the phrase: "I belong to Paul", or "I belong to Apollos...". Gossip has been a reality since the beginning of the Church, because the devil does not want the Church to be a fertile mother, united, joyful. What instead is the sign that these two relationships, between priest and Bishop and between priest and the other priests, are going well? It is joy. Just as bitterness is the sign that there is no real diocesan spirituality, because a good relationship with the Bishop or the presbytery is lacking, joy is a sign that things are working. You can discuss, you can get angry, but there is joy above all, and it is important that it always remains in these two relationships which are essential to the spirituality of the diocesan priest.

I would like to return to another sign, the sign of bitterness. Once a priest told me, here in Rome: "But, I often see we are a Church of angry people, always angry with each other; we always have something to be angry about". This leads to sadness and bitterness: there is no joy. When we find a priest in a diocese who lives with anger and tension, we think: but this man has vinegar for breakfast. Then at lunch, pickled vegetables, and then in the evening some lemon juice. His life is not working because it is the image of a Church of angry people. Instead, joy is a sign that things are going well. You can get angry: it is even healthy to get angry once. But the state of anger is not of the Lord and it leads to sadness and disunity. And in the end, you said "fidelity to God and man". It is the same as we said before. It is twofold faithfulness and twofold transcendence: to be faithful to God is to seek him, to open oneself to Him in prayer, remembering that He is the faithful one. He cannot deny Himself; he is always faithful. And then opening oneself to others; it is that empathy, that respect, that listening, and saying the right word with patience.

We must stop in order to love the faithful who are waiting.... But I thank you, truly, and I ask you to pray for me, because even I have the difficulties of every Bishop and I have to resume the path of conversion every day. Prayer for each other will do us good to keep moving forward. Thank you for your patience.