



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO COLOMBIA

(6-11 SEPTEMBER 2017)

RECONCILIATION LITURGY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Las Malocas Park (Villavicencio)

Friday, 8 September 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have been looking forward to this moment since my arrival in your country. You carry in your hearts and your flesh the signs of the recent, living memory of your people which is marked by tragic events, but also filled with heroic acts, great humanity, and the noble spiritual values of faith and hope. We have listened to this. I come here with respect and with a clear awareness that, like Moses, I am standing on sacred ground (cf. *Ex 3:5*). A land watered by the blood of thousands of innocent victims and by the heart-breaking sorrow of their families and friends. Wounds that are hard to heal and that hurt us all, because every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanity's flesh; every violent death diminishes us as people.

I am here not so much to speak, but to be close to you and to see you with my own eyes, to listen to you and to open my heart to your witness of life and faith. And if you will allow me, I wish also to embrace you and, if God gives me the grace – because it is a grace – I wish also to weep with you. I would like us to pray together and to forgive one another – I also need to ask forgiveness – so that, together, we can all look and walk forward in faith and hope.

We have gathered at the feet of the Crucifix of Bojayá, which witnessed and endured the

massacre of more than a hundred people, who had come to the Church for refuge on 2 May 2002. This image has a powerful symbolic and spiritual value. As we look at it, we remember not only what happened on that day, but also the immense suffering, the many deaths and broken lives, and all the blood spilt in Colombia these past decades. To see Christ this way, mutilated and wounded, questions us. He no longer has arms, nor is his body there, but his face remains, with which he looks upon us and loves us. Christ broken and without limbs is for us “even more Christ”, because he shows us once more that he came to suffer *for* his people and *with* his people. He came to show us that hatred does not have the last word, that love is stronger than death and violence. He teaches us to transform pain into a source of life and resurrection, so that, with him, we may learn the power of forgiveness, the grandeur of love.

I thank the four of you, who have shared your testimonies with us, on behalf of so many others. How good it is for us – it may seem selfish to say so – how good it is for us to hear your stories! I am moved listening to them. They are stories of suffering and anguish, but also, and above all, they are stories of love and forgiveness that speak to us of life and hope; stories of not letting hatred, vengeance or pain take control of our hearts.

The final prophecy of Psalm 85 – “Mercy and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (v. 10) – follows the working of grace and the petition to God: “Restore us!” Thank you, Lord, for the witness of those who inflicted suffering and who ask for forgiveness; for the witness of those who suffered unjustly and who forgive. This is only possible with your help and presence... this is already a great sign of your desire to restore peace and harmony in this land of Colombia.

Pastora Mira, you put it well: you want to place all your suffering, and that of the thousands of victims, at the feet of Jesus Crucified, so that united to his suffering, it may be transformed into ***blessing*** and ***forgiveness*** so as to break the cycle of violence that has reigned over Colombia. You are right: violence leads to more violence, hatred to more hatred, death to more death. We must break this cycle which seems inescapable; this is only possible through forgiveness and concrete reconciliation. And you, dear Pastora, and so many others like you, have shown us that this is possible. With the help of Christ, Christ alive in the midst of the community, it is possible to conquer hatred, it is possible to conquer death and it is possible to begin again and usher in a new Colombia. Thank you, Pastora; you have helped us greatly today by the witness of your life. It is the Crucified One of Bojayá who has given you this strength to forgive and to love, to help you to see in the shirt that your daughter Sandra Paola gave to your son Jorge Aníbal not only a remembrance of their deaths, but the hope that peace will finally triumph in Colombia. Thank you, thank you!”

We are also moved by what Luz Dary said in her testimony: that the wounds of the heart are deeper and more difficult to heal than those of the body. This is true. Even more important, you realized that it is not possible to live with resentment, but only with a ***love*** that ***liberates*** and

builds. And so you also began to heal the wounds of other victims, to rebuild their dignity. This going out of yourself has enriched you, has helped you look ahead, find peace and serenity and also the motivation to keep moving forward. I thank you for the crutch you have offer. Although you still have wounds, the side-effects from your injuries, your spiritual gait is fast and steady. Your spiritual walking does not need crutches; it is fast and steady because you think of others – thank you – and you want to help them. Your crutch is a symbol of the more important crutch we all need, which is love and forgiveness. By your love and forgiveness you are helping so many people to walk in life and to walk quickly like you. Thank you.

I wish to acknowledge also the powerful testimony of Deisy and Juan Carlos. You have helped us to understand that, in the end, in one way or another, *we too are victims*, innocent or guilty, but all are victims, be they from one side or the other: all are victims. We are all united in this loss of humanity that means violence and death. Deisy has said it clearly: you realized that you yourself were a victim and you needed to be given a chance. When you said this, the word struck a chord in my heart. So you started to study, and now you work to help victims and prevent young people from falling into the snares of violence and drugs, which is another kind of violence. There is also hope for those who did wrong; all is not lost. Jesus came for this: there is hope for those who did wrong. Of course justice requires that perpetrators of wrongdoing undergo moral and spiritual renewal. As Deisy said, we must make a positive contribution to healing this society that has been wounded by violence.

It can be difficult to believe that change is possible for those who appealed to a ruthless violence in order to promote their own agenda, protect their illegal affairs so they could gain wealth, or claim – dishonestly – that they were defending the lives of their brothers and sisters. Undoubtedly, it is a challenge for each of us to trust that those who inflicted suffering on communities and on a whole country *can take a step forward*. It is true that in this enormous field of Colombia there is nevertheless room for weeds. We must not deceive ourselves. You must be attentive to the fruits. Care for the wheat and do not lose peace because of the weeds. When the sower finds weeds mingled with the wheat, he or she is not alarmed. Search for the way in which the Word becomes incarnate in concrete situations and produces the fruit of new life, even if it appears to be imperfect or incomplete (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium, 24*). Even when conflicts, violence and feelings of vengeance remain, may we not prevent justice and mercy from embracing Colombia's painful history. Let us heal that pain and welcome every person who has committed offences, who admits their failures, is repentant and truly wants to make reparation, thus contributing to the building of a new order where justice and peace shine forth.

As Juan Carlos has let us glimpse in his testimony, throughout this long, difficult, but hopeful process of reconciliation, it is also indispensable to come to terms with the *truth*. It is a great challenge, but a necessary one. Truth is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace; each, moreover, prevents the other from being altered and transformed into instruments of revenge against the weakest. Indeed, truth should not

lead to revenge, but rather to reconciliation and forgiveness. Truth means telling families torn apart by pain what happened to their missing relatives. Truth means confessing what happened to minors recruited by violent people. Truth means recognizing the pain of women who are victims of violence and abuse.

I wish finally, as a brother and a father, to say this: Colombia, open your heart as the People of God and be reconciled. Fear neither the truth nor justice. Dear people of Colombia: do not be afraid of asking for forgiveness and offering it. Do not resist that reconciliation which allows you to draw near and encounter one another as brothers and sisters, and surmount enmity. Now is the time to heal wounds, to build bridges, to overcome differences. It is time to defuse hatred, to renounce vengeance, and to open yourselves to a coexistence founded on justice, truth, and the creation of a genuine culture of fraternal encounter. May we live in harmony and solidarity, as the Lord desires. Let us pray to be builders of peace, so that where there is hatred and resentment, we may bring love and mercy (cf. *Prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi*).

And all these intentions, the testimonies we have heard, the things each of you know in your hearts, the stories of years of pain and suffering, I wish to place before the image of the Crucified One, the black Christ of Bojayá:

* * *

O black Christ of Bojayá,
 who remind us of your passion and death;
 together with your arms and feet
 they have torn away your children
 who sought refuge in you.

O black Christ of Bojayá,
 who look tenderly upon us
 and in whose face is serenity;
 your heart beats
 so that we may be received in your love.

O black Christ of Bojayá,
 Grant us to commit ourselves to restoring your body. May we be your feet that go forth to
 encounter
 our brothers and sisters in need;
 your arms to embrace
 those who have lost their dignity;
 your hands to bless and console
 those who weep alone.

Make us witnesses
to your love and infinite mercy.

Amen.

[After the Prayer]

We have prayed to Jesus, the Christ, the mutilated Christ. Before giving you the Blessing, I invite you to pray to Our Mother, whose heart was pierced with pain: "*Hail Mary...*".

[The Blessing]