



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE DIOCESES OF UGENTO AND MOLFETTA

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 1 December 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank you for coming, so enthusiastic, so joyful. Thank you! I am grateful to Msgr. Vito Angiuli and Msgr. Domenico Cornacchia for the words they addressed to me on your behalf. And thank you also for the bread: a good bread for making a sandwich!

The memory of Don Tonino Bello has joined our paths: [mine towards you in April](#) and yours towards me in these days. I would like to welcome you with a phrase full of affection, which Don Tonino pronounced at the end of the last Chrism Mass, just before living his own Pasch: “I would like to say, one by one, looking into your eyes: ‘I love you’”. And may this be our way of living: as brothers and sisters who, looking into each other’s eyes, know how to say “I love you”.

On that occasion Don Tonino made a recommendation. He said: “I urge you, tomorrow, do not be sad about any bitterness in your home, or any other bitterness. Do not grieve over your life”. Those who believe in Jesus can not be sad; “The opposite of a Christian people is a sad people” (*The Gospel of Courage*, 2012, 145). Let us make our own his recommendation never to be sad: if we put it into practice we will bring the treasure of God’s joy into the poverty of man today. Indeed, those who are sad remain alone, speak badly of others, gossip here and there... They have a sad heart. The gossip has a sad heart! This is the root. Here too, when they gossip, it is because that man, that woman, is sad. Indeed, those who become sad remain alone and do not have friends. Those who are sad see only problems; they see only the dark side of life. Perhaps it is all good, all white, all bright, but he or she will see the flaw, see the shadow, the negative. At times, when we find people like this, who always live sad and critical, one finds oneself thinking, “But what do you have in your veins? Blood or vinegar?”. Instead, those who put the Lord before their problems find

joy again. Then they stop crying and, instead of being sad, they begin to do the opposite: to console, to help.

Dear brothers and sisters, this evening there begins a time of consolation and hope, the time of Advent: there begins a new liturgical year, which brings with it the *newness* of our God, Who is the “the God of all comfort” (2 *Cor* 1: 3). If we look within, we see that all novelties, even the continuous ones of today, are not enough to satisfy our expectations. We remain always hungry, with this rhythm of novelty, novelty... and yet you are not sated. “We tend towards new things because we are born for great things”, wrote Don Tonino (*Non c’è fedeltà senza rischio*, 2000, 34). And it is true: we were born to be with the Lord. When we let God enter, we arrive at true newness. He renews, displaces, always surprises: He is the God of surprises. Living Advent means “opting for the unprecedented”, for the new, it is accepting the good disorder of God and His prophets, such as Don Tonino. For him, to welcome the Lord meant being willing to change our plans (cf. *ibid.*, 102). I like to think of Saint Joseph. He, a good man, fell asleep, and his plans changed. He fell asleep again, and his plans changed again. He goes to Egypt, he falls asleep again, and returns from Egypt... May it be God to change our plans with our joy!

It is beautiful to await the novelty of God in life: not to live by expectations, which then maybe do not come true, but in expectation, that is, desiring the Lord Who always brings newness. It is important to know how to wait. One does not await God with arms crossed, but active in love. “The true sadness”, Don Tonino recalled, “is when you no longer expect anything of life” (*Cirenei della gioia*, 2004, 97). We Christians are called upon to preserve and spread the joy of waiting: we await God Who loves us infinitely and at the same time we are awaited by Him. In this way, life becomes a great period of betrothal. We are not left to ourselves, we are not alone. We are visited, now already. Today you have come to me, I waited for you and I thank you, but God will visit you where I cannot come: in your homes, in your lives. God visits us and waits to stay with us for ever. Today, tomorrow, always. If you banish Him, the Lord remains at the door, waiting, waiting for you to let Him enter another time. Let us never banish the Lord from our life! He is always waiting to stay with us.

I hope you will live Advent in this way, as a time of consoling newness and awaited joy. “Here on earth there is the Lord Who awaits the return of man”. This is beautiful! God too waits for us to go there. This is the time of Advent. In this way Don Tonino spoke thirty years ago, commenting on the Gospel we will hear this Sunday, with words that seem to have been written today. He noted that life is full of fears: “Fear of our peer. Fear of our neighbour... Fear of the other... Fear of violence... Fear of not succeeding. Fear of not being accepted... Fear that it is useless to make the effort. Fear that, in any case, we cannot change the world... Fear of not finding work”. (*Homily*, 27 November 1988). To this bleak scenario, he said that Advent responded with the “anti-fear Gospel”. Because while those who are afraid remain on the ground, defeated, the Lord with His word raises up. He does this with the “two anti-fear verbs, the two typical verbs of Advent”: *stand up* and *lift up your heads* (cf. *Lk* 21: 28). While fear makes us stay on the ground, the Lord invites

us to get up again; if negativity makes us look downwards, Jesus invites us to raise our gaze to heaven, from where He arrives. Because we are not children of fear, but children of God; because fear is defeated by overcoming withdrawal into oneself, with Jesus.

You know well the beauty of the sea – how beautiful your sea is! I say one thing to you: it is the bluest sea I have ever seen in my life. Beautiful! This sea embraces you with its greatness. Looking at it, you can think of the meaning of life: embraced by God, infinite beauty, you cannot remain moored in safe harbours, but are instead called to put out to sea, always. The Lord calls each one of us to set out for the open sea. He does not want us to be controllers of the pier or guardians of the lighthouse, but trustful and courageous navigators, who follow the hitherto unsailed routes of the Lord, casting the nets of life on His word. A life “without” – without risks and full of fears, that protects itself, is not a Christian life. It is a life without fruitfulness. We are not made for peaceful slumber, but for bold dreams. So, let us welcome the invitation of the gospel, that invitation repeated many times by Don Tonino to stand up, to raise up. From where? From the sofas of life, from the comfort that makes us idle, from the worldliness that sickens us within, from the self-pity that makes us gloomy. “Getting up means abandoning the floor of evil, of violence, of ambiguity, because sin ages the earth” (*ibid.*). Get back up on your feet, let us raise our gaze to heaven. We will also feel the need to open our hands to our neighbour. And the consolation that we will be able to give will heal our fears.

Before giving you my blessing, I would like to greet you with a few words of hope, those of the last brief “homily” that Don Tonino pronounced from his bed, awaiting Jesus: “My Lord and my God! I too want to see the risen Lord and to be a wellspring of hope and joy for all. My Lord and my God!” May it be thus also for us. Thank you.

**Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 1 December 2018*
