



The Holy See

DAY OF PRAYER AND WITNESS ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD DAY OF THE POOR IN ASSISI

Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels (Assisi)

Friday, 12 November 2021

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POPE MEETS SISTERS OF THE POOR CLARE COMMUNITY

They are always celebrating: this is a true Poor Clare, ... 'Always'. Because Saint Augustine used to say that one needs to always be attentive. He would say: "I fear the Lord will pass by and I will not be aware that he is passing". This attentiveness of the Spirit and of you too, of the bride who always waits for the Lord to pass by. This is beautiful, to be attentive. The attentive spirit, not the spirit scattered everywhere, no; attentive, awaiting the Lord. I love when I find contemplative nuns who are attentive.

And to be attentive, one needs to have three things at peace. To have one's *mind at peace*. Because sometimes, you know, the mind wanders.... There are always people, even me, everyone, with the temptation to be everywhere, looking.... As a child, I remember that there was a lady in the neighbourhood who they used to call — I don't know if this is the translation — the "curtain twitcher", because she spent the whole day behind the window screen, watching what was going on. No, that attentiveness is not helpful, because it is lost in what is happening. But attentiveness of a mind that is clean, attentive to what is happening, because it *thinks well*. For example, a mind that thinks well is a mind that does not waste time in thoughts of gossip about

others. It thinks well about people. To think ill means the devil is already there, does it not?; he is enough on his own. The mind at peace.

The second thing, for being attentive to the Lord, is a *heart at peace*. Always returning to the beginning of your vocation: why was I called? To have a career? To attain this position, that other one? No. To love and to let myself be loved. And always returning to the start of your vocation. Each of us has the beginning of our vocation in our heart. Returning with our memory, and thus setting the heart right with what the heart felt at that moment. The joy of following Jesus, of accompanying him.

And then, the *hands at peace*. It is true that in order to pray you should be like this [*he makes the gesture of folded hands*]; but the hands must also move in order to work. Meaning, a consecrated man or woman who does not work, should not eat. Paul says this in a Letter to the Thessalonians: those who do not work, let them not eat.

Mind, heart and hands, always doing what they should be doing, and not doing other things.

And in this way, I would say, a consecrated man, a consecrated woman, a nun, has balance. It is a fiery balance, it is not a cold balance: it is filled with love and passion. And it is easy to realize when the Lord passes, and to not let him pass by without listening to what he wants to say. This is your work. You bear on your shoulders the problems of the Church, the suffering of the Church and also — I dare say — the sins of the Church, our sins, those of the bishops, we are sinful bishops, everyone; the sins of priests; the sins of consecrated souls.... And to bring them before the Lord: “They are sinners, but let it go, forgive them”, always with an intercession for the Church.

The danger is to not be sinners. If I asked myself now: “Who among you is not a sinner?”, no one would speak. We say this: we are all sinners. The danger is that sin may become a habit, like a *normal* attitude; because when sin, a sinful attitude, becomes like this, it is no longer sin; it becomes *corruption*. And the corrupt are incapable of asking for forgiveness; they are unable to realize they have made mistakes. The way of corruption only has a one-way ticket; rarely a return ticket. Instead, the life of sinners feels the need to ask for forgiveness. Never lose this feeling of needing to ask for forgiveness, always.

What does this mean? That we are sinners, that we are not corrupt. If at a certain point one says: “No, I do not feel the need to ask for forgiveness”, be careful: you are going down the path of corruption. Ask that the Church not be corrupt, because the corruption of the Church is terrible! It is of “high quality”: corrupt priests, bishops and nuns are of the highest quality! Let us think of those Jansenist nuns, for example, of Port Royal: they were very pure, like angels, but it was said that they were as arrogant as devils. It is corruption of the highest quality, the corruption of good people. There is a saying that says: “*Corruptio optimi pessimi*”, which means the corruption of those who are more good is terrible, it is the worst. Always with the humility of feeling we are

sinner, because the Lord always forgives; he looks the other way. He forgives everything.

A confessor in Buenos Aires who was 92 years old said to me — he still continues to hear confessions at 94, he always has a queue at the confessional; he is a Capuchin. He has a queue of men, women, children, young people, workers, priests, bishops, sisters, everyone, the whole flock of the People of God goes to him to confess because he is a good confessor.... — One day he came to the episcopate, he was not too old yet, he must have been 84, he came to me and said: “You know” — he addressed me informally; this man spoke to everyone informally — “you know there is a problem...”. — “Tell me, tell me” — “It is that sometimes I feel bad because I forgive too much.... And I feel something inside...”. He was a man of deep prayer, of deep contemplation. “And tell me, what do you do, Luigi, when you feel this way?” — “Well, I go to the chapel and pray, and I say: ‘Lord, forgive me, because I have forgiven too much’”. — “But are you lenient?” — “No, no, I say serious things, but I forgive because I feel I must forgive”. I once said to him — not that time, before then: “But sometimes do you remember not having forgiven?” — “No, I don’t remember this”. This is a good confessor, isn’t he? “And what do you do?” — “I go to the chapel, I look at the Tabernacle: ‘Lord, forgive me, I have forgiven too much!’. But at a certain point I said to him: ‘But be careful: because it was you who gave me the bad example!’”. God forgives *everything*. He only asks for our humility to ask for forgiveness. This is why it is important not to lose this habit of asking for forgiveness, which is a virtue. Instead, a corrupt person loses it. Sinners yes, corrupt no!

I wondered: but did Our Lady sometimes ask for forgiveness? The Immaculate.... It is a theological question, to ask nuns.... But I don’t believe that Our Lady was always “above herself”: in the small things, in which she thought she had made mistakes, surely she apologized to the Lord, although they were not objective, but she was like this. For example, I think of that journey to Jerusalem, where the boy had slipped away and stayed away: but how many times she must have asked for forgiveness! ‘I should have been closer...’. There are these things in life, aren’t there? Why do I ask this, this question? Because even the most perfect one has to have a heart that is open to asking for forgiveness, always. It is the most beautiful thing, to be forgiven.

Yesterday afternoon I was with a group of young people who work in preaching the Gospel to today’s young people. Young artists too, those in the groups who do these new things, especially in the United States, Hollywood, that area. They showed me — some scenes — with these young people about whom some say, they don’t even believe in their own noses.... They did the Parable of the Prodigal Son: the whole story about a modern, present-day young man who wastes his father’s money, who falls into all the vices and then in the end, speaking to a friend, he says: “I’m not happy; I’m sad because I miss my dad. I miss my dad. I have done all these dirty things and I took an ugly path that doesn’t help me.... But I don’t dare return home because I am afraid my dad will reject me or beat me or insult me ... I don’t feel like it”. And that friend says to him: “But don’t you have a friend who could go and ask your dad: ‘What would happen if your son came back?’” — “No, I no longer have anyone”. — “But, if you want, I can go, and I will tell him to give you a

sign”. — “But what sign?”. And they talked about this. And in the end he says: “I will go, I will speak to your dad, I will tell him that you have this desire to ask for forgiveness and to return, but that you don’t know if you will be well received, and that if he would welcome you, he should put a white handkerchief on the terrace, in plain view”. And the son began the journey, and when he was close to home he saw it: he saw the house *filled* with white handkerchiefs! In other words, our hands are not big enough to receive all that He gives us, even when we are sinners and we ask him for forgiveness. And this is how our Father’s abundance is: he awaits us with his house dressed with many white handkerchiefs! He is more generous!

I remember, returning to forgiveness — I like to talk about forgiveness, because it is a positive thing: more than sin, forgiveness — when Peter asks the Lord: “But how many times must I forgive? Is seven times okay?” — “Seventy times seven”, that is, *always*. In fact, when he teaches us the Our Father, forgiving others is a condition to be forgiven. You, in your chapter, for example — it will happen, I don’t believe here, but let’s think of another convent — one of you is angry, her face is a bit sour, let’s say, “because I’m angry with that other one, but she’s the one who should ask me for forgiveness because it was she...”. The small things in a community, we all know them, I too was in a community and I know how a community is. Even in the Curia these things happen.... But take the first step! Give a smile, just a smile! It is a beautiful day....

I don’t know if I spoke about this last time: Teresina. When she had to leave the choir, before dinner, 10 minutes before, to take Mother San Pietro to the dining hall because the poor thing limped everywhere; she was a little impatient, and if Teresina touched her she would say: “Don’t touch me! If you touch me it’s a sin!”. This bitterness sometimes happens. And what did Teresina do? A smile, always. She took her, had her sit down, cut her bread, everything, so when the other sisters arrived everything was ready for dinner to begin. And once, when Mother San Pietro’s complaining was so strong, Teresina heard the music of a dance [in the house next to the monastery] and said: “There are people dancing, happy people, people having fun.... But I wouldn’t trade this for that, for me this is more beautiful”. The beauty of fraternal charity.

And living this charity means having an open heart, open hands, a mind that is open to the encounter with the Lord, so that he does not pass by without me realizing it.

Well. Perhaps some may be thinking: “When will this priest finish ... is it a Lenten sermon?” I thank you. Think of the Church. Think of the elderly, of grandparents, who are often “throw away material”: they don’t want to have them with the family because they are a bother and they put them in some place.... Think of families, how the mother and father have to work, so often, to get to the end of the month, to have food to eat. Pray for families so they may know how to raise children well. Think of children, young people and the many threats of worldliness which does so much harm. Think of the nuns, of consecrated women like you, of those who have to work in schools, in hospitals. Think of the priests. Teresina entered Carmel to pray for priests: we need it, we need it. Pray that we may know how to be shepherds and not office managers: that priests

may be bishops, parish priests, that they may have this pastoral nature, to be shepherds.

Nothing else comes to mind for me to say. I think the Lenten sermon has been long! I thank you very much.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank you for accepting my invitation — I was the guest! — to celebrate here in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, the fifth World Day of the Poor that will be celebrated the day after tomorrow. It is an idea that came from you, it grew, and we have now reached the fifth edition. Assisi is not just like any other city: Assisi bears the imprint of the face of Saint Francis. To think that he lived his restless youth along these streets, he received the call to live the Gospel to the letter, is a fundamental lesson for us. Certainly, in some ways, his holiness makes us quiver because it seems impossible to imitate him. But then, when we remember some moments of his life, those “little flowers” that were collected to show the beauty of his vocation, we feel attracted by his simplicity of heart and simplicity of life: it is the very attraction to Christ, to the Gospel. These are actual facts of his life that are worth more than preaching.

I would like to recall one of them that expresses well the personality of the Poverello (cf. Little Flowers, chapter 13: Fonti Francescane, 1841-1842). He and Brother Masseo had embarked on a journey to go to France, but they had not taken any provisions with them. At a certain point, they had to begin to ask for charity. Francis went in one direction and Brother Masseo in another. But, as the Little Flowers recount, Francis was small of stature and those who did not know him took him to be a “tramp”; instead, Brother Masseo “was a tall and handsome man”. Thus it was that Saint Francis succeeded in obtaining some pieces of stale and hard bread, while Brother Masseo was given some beautiful pieces of bread.

When the two found themselves together again, they sat down on the ground and placed what they had collected on a rock. Seeing the pieces of bread his brother had collected, Francis said: “Brother Masseo, we are not worthy of this great treasure”. The brother, marveling, responded: “Father Francis, how can you speak of a treasure where there is such poverty and even what is necessary is lacking?” Francis replied: “It is precisely this that I consider a great treasure, that there is nothing, but what we have has been given by Providence who has given us this bread”. This is the teaching that Saint Francis gives us: knowing how to be content with the little we have and to share it with others.

We are here at the Portiuncula, one of the small churches that Saint Francis thought of restoring after Jesus had asked him to “repair his house”. At that time, he would never have thought that the Lord was asking him to give his life to renew not the church made of stone, but the one made of persons, of men and women who are the living stones of the Church. And if we are here today, it is precisely to learn from what Saint Francis did. He liked to stay to pray for long periods in this little church. He would recollect himself here in silence and put himself in an attitude of listening, listening to what God wanted of him. We too have come here for this: we want to ask the Lord to hear our cry, to hear our cry and to come to our aid. Let us not forget that the first marginalisation the poor suffer from is spiritual marginalization. For example, many people and many young people find a bit of time to help the poor and bring them food and hot beverages. This is very good and I thank God for their generosity. But I especially rejoice when I hear that these volunteers stop a bit and speak with the people, and sometimes pray together with them... So, even our being here at the Portiuncula, reminds us of the Lord’s company, that He never leaves us alone, he always accompanies us in every moment of our lives. The Lord today is with us. He accompanies us, in listening, in prayer and in the testimonies given: it is He, with us.

There is another important fact: here at the Portiuncula, Saint Francis welcomed Saint Clare, the first brothers, and many poor people who came to him. He received them simply as brothers and sisters, sharing everything with them. This is the most evangelical expression we are called to make our own: hospitality. Hospitality means to open the door, the door of our house and the door of our heart, and to allow the person who knocks to come in. And that they may feel welcome, not ashamed, no, at ease, free. Where there is a true sense of fraternity, a sincere experience of hospitality is also lived there. Instead, where there is fear of the other, contempt for their lives, then rejection is born, or worse, indifference: looking the other way. Hospitality generates a sense of community; rejection, on the contrary, closes in on one’s own egoism. Mother Teresa, who made hospitable service her life, used to love to say: “what is the best welcome? A smile”. A smile. To share a smile with someone in need does good to both people – to me and the other person. A smile as an expression of sympathy, of tenderness. And then, a smile engages you, and you cannot turn away from a person who has smiled at you.

I thank you because you have come here from many different countries to live this experience of encounter and of faith. I would like to thank God who gave us this idea of the Day of the Poor. An idea born in a rather strange way, in the sacristy. I was about to celebrate Mass and one of you — his name is Étienne — do you know him? He is an enfant terrible — Étienne suggested to me: “Let’s have a Day of the Poor”. I went out and I felt that the Holy Spirit, inside, was telling me to do it. That is how it began: from the courage of one of you who had the courage to carry things forward. I thank him for his work over the years and the work of so many who accompany him. And I would like to thank Cardinal [Barbarin] for his presence: he is among the poor, he too has suffered with dignity the experience of poverty, of abandonment, of distrust. And he has defended himself with silence and prayer. Thank you, Cardinal Barbarin, for your testimony which builds up the Church. I was saying that we have come to meet each other: this is the first thing, that is, to go

towards each other with an open heart and outstretched hand. We know that every one of us needs the other, and that even weakness, if experienced together, can become a strength that will make the world better. The presence of the poor is often seen as an annoyance and is put up with. Sometimes we hear it said that those responsible for poverty are the poor! A further insult. So as not to carry out a serious examination of conscience on one's own actions, on the injustice of certain laws and economic measures, an examination of conscience on the hypocrisy of those who want to enrich themselves excessively, blame is laid at the feet of those who are weakest.

Rather it is time that the poor be given back their voice, because for too long their requests have remained unheard. It is time that eyes be opened to see the state of inequality in which many families live. It is time for sleeves to be rolled up so dignity can be restored by creating jobs. It is time to be scandalised once again before the reality of children who are starving, reduced to slavery, tossed about in the water in the aftermath of a shipwreck, innocent victims of every sort of violence. It is time that violence against women cease and that they be respected and not treated like bargaining chips. It is time that the circle of indifference be broken so as to discover once again the beauty of encounter and dialogue. It is time to meet each other. It is the time to meet. If humanity, if we men and women do not learn to meet each other, we are heading for a very sad end.

I have attentively listened to your testimonies, and I thank you for everything you have courageously and sincerely expressed. Courageously, because you wanted to share these things with all of us, even though they are a part of your personal lives; sincerely, because you expressed yourselves exactly as you are and opened your hearts with the desire to be understood. There are some things in particular that I liked and would like to summarize them somehow to make them even more my own and let them settle into my heart. First of all, I perceived a tremendous sense of hope. Life has not always treated you well; indeed, it has often shown you its cruel face. Marginalisation, suffering sickness and loneliness, the lack of so many necessary means has not stopped you from seeing with eyes filled with gratitude the little things that have enabled you to hold out.

To hold out. This is the second impression I received and that comes directly from hope. What does it mean to hold out? To have the strength to keep going despite everything. To swim against the tide. To hold out is not a passive action, on the contrary, it requires the courage to take a new path knowing it will bear fruit. To hold out means to find reasons for not giving up when confronted with difficulties, knowing that we do not experience them alone but together, and that only together can we overcome them. To hold out against every temptation to give up and fall into loneliness and sadness. To hold out, holding on to the little wealth we may have. I think of the girl in Afghanistan, with her striking phrase: my body is here, my soul is there. Holding out with memory, today. I think of the Romanian mother who spoke at the end: pain, hope and no way out, but strong hope in her children who accompany her and repay the tenderness they received from her.

Let us ask the Lord to always help us find serenity and joy. Here at the Portiuncula, Saint Francis teaches us the joy that comes from seeing those who are near us as traveling companions who understand and support us, just as we are for him or for her. May this meeting open all of our hearts to put ourselves at each other's disposal; to open our hearts to make our weakness a strength to help continue on the journey of life, to transform our poverty into wealth to be shared, and thus to make the world better.

The Day of the Poor. Thank you to the poor who open their hearts to give us their wealth and heal our wounded hearts. Thank you for this courage. Thank you, Étienne, for being docile to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for these years of work; and also for the “stubbornness” of bringing the Pope to Assisi! Thank you! Thank you, Your Eminence, for your support, for your help to this Church movement — we say “movement” because they are on the move — and for your testimony. And thank you all. I carry you all in my heart. And, please, do not forget to pray for me, because I have my poverty, in many ways! Thank you.

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