The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO CASERTA

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Park of the Royal Palace of Caserta
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Jesus addressed his listeners with simple words that everyone could understand. This evening too, that is what we heard. He speaks to us through short parables, which refer to the everyday life of the people of that time. The similes of the treasure hidden in a field and of the pearl of great value have as protagonists a poor labourer and a rich merchant. The merchant searches his whole life for an object of value to satisfy his thirst for beauty, travelling the world, never giving up, in the hope of finding what he is searching for. The other, the farmer, never goes far from his field and always does his work, as a daily routine. And the outcome is the same for both of them: the discovery of something precious, for one a treasure, for the other a pearl of great value. They are both joined by a common sentiment: the surprise and the joy of having every desire fulfilled. In the end, neither hesitates to sell all in order to obtain the treasure he has found. Through these two parables Jesus teaches what the Kingdom of Heaven is, how to find it, what to do to obtain it.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus did not go out of his way to explain it. He pronounced it from the very start of his Gospel: “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”; — even today it is nearby, among us — however he never lets us see it directly, but always by reflection, recounting the act of a master, of a king, of 10 virgins.... He prefers to leave it open to interpretation, with parables and similes, manifesting above all the effects: the Kingdom of Heaven can change the world, like yeast hidden in dough; it is small and humble like a mustard seed, which however will become tall like a tree. The two parables on which we reflect help us understand that the Kingdom of God is present in the very person of Jesus. He is the hidden treasure, He is the pearl of great value. One understands the joy of the farmer and the merchant: they had found Him! It is the joy we each

have when we discover the closeness and the presence of Jesus in our life. A presence which transforms our existence and makes us open to the needs of our brothers and sisters; a presence which prompts us to welcome every other presence, even that of the foreigner and the immigrant. His is a welcoming presence, and a joyous presence, his is a fruitful presence: in this way the Kingdom of God is inside us.

You may ask me: *How does one find the Kingdom of God?* Each of us has a particular journey, each of us has his path in life. For some the encounter with Jesus is awaited, desired, long sought, as it is revealed to us in the parable of the merchant who travels the world in search of something valuable. For others it happens suddenly, almost by chance, as in the parable of the farmer. This reminds us that God allows Himself to be met, because He is the first who desires to encounter us and the first to seek that encounter with us: he came to be “God with us”. And Jesus is among us, He is here today. He said: when you are gathered in my name, I am among you. The Lord is here, He is with us, He is in our midst! It is He who seeks us, it is He who lets Himself be found even by those who do not seek Him. At times He allows Himself to be found in unusual places and at unexpected times. When one finds Jesus, that person is captivated, overcome, and it is a joy to leave our usual lifestyle, sometimes desolate and apathetic, to embrace the Gospel, to let ourselves be guided by the new logic of love and of humble and unselfish service. The Word of Jesus, the Gospel. I’ll ask you a question, but I don’t want you to answer: How many of you read a passage of the Gospel every day? How many of you, perhaps, rush to finish work so you don’t miss a TV program.... To have the Gospel in your hands, to have the Gospel on your bedside table, to have the Gospel in your pocket, to open it and read the Word of Jesus: this is how the Kingdom of God comes. Contact with the Word of God draws us near to the Kingdom of God. Consider this: a small Gospel always at hand, ready to open when the opportunity arises, ready to read what Jesus says; Jesus is there.

How does one obtain the Kingdom of God? Jesus is very explicit on this point: it’s not enough to have enthusiasm, but the joy of discovery. It is essential to place the precious pearl of the Kingdom before every other worldly good; we must place God first in our life, prefer Him to all else. Giving primacy to God means having the courage to say ‘no’ to evil, ‘no’ to violence, ‘no’ to oppression, to live a life in service of others and which fosters lawfulness and the common good. When a person discovers God, the true treasure, he abandons a selfish lifestyle and seeks to share with others the charity which comes from God. He who becomes a friend of God, loves his brothers and sisters, commits himself to safeguarding their life and their health, and also to respecting the environment and nature. I know that you suffer because of these things. Today, when I arrived, one of you approached me and told me: Father may you give us hope. But I cannot give you hope, I can tell you that where Jesus is, there is hope; where Jesus is there is love for brothers and sisters, there is the commitment to safeguarding their life and their health and to respecting the environment and nature. This is the hope that never disappoints, the hope which Jesus gives! This is particularly important in this beautiful land which needs to be protected and conserved, which requires the courage to say ‘no’ to every form of corruption and unlawfulness —

we all know what this kind of corruption and unlawfulness is called — it requires all of us to be servants of the truth and to assume an evangelical lifestyle, which is demonstrated in the giving of oneself and in attention to the poor and the outcast. Take care of the poor and the outcast! The Bible is full of these exhortations. The Lord says: it is not important to me that you do this or that, it is important to me that the orphan is cared for, that the widow is cared for, that the outcast person is heard, that creation is protected. This is the Kingdom of God!

Today is the Feast of Saint Anne, whom I like to call Jesus' grandma and today is a beautiful day to celebrate grandmothers. While I was incensing I saw something beautiful: the statue of St Anne is not crowned, her daughter, Mary, is crowned. And this is beautiful. St Anne is the woman who prepared her daughter to become queen, to become queen of heaven and earth. This woman did a good job! St Anne, patron saint of Caserta, gathered in this square various parts of the Diocesan Community with the Bishop and with the presence of the civic leaders and representatives of various social organizations. I wish to encourage all of you to experience the feast of the patron saint free of all prejudice, in the pure expression of the faith of a people who recognize themselves as the family of God and which strengthens the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity. Perhaps St Anne heard her daughter Mary proclaim the words of the *Magnificat*, which Mary surely repeated many times: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things" (Lk 1:52-53). May she help you to seek the sole treasure, Jesus, and teach you to discover God's criteria for behaviour; He overturns the world's judgments and comes in aid of the poor and the small ones and fills the lowly with good things, those who entrust their existence to Him. Have hope, the hope which does not disappoint. And I like to repeat to you: do not let them steal your hope!

At the end of Mass in Caserta, before the final blessing, the Holy Father addressed these spontaneous remarks to the faithful:

I thank the Bishop for his words: thank you, your words were so kind! Thank you very much! And I thank you for the warm and brotherly welcome. Thank you! Thank you so much! And please, I ask you to pray for me. I also thank the Cardinal Archbishop of Naples. I heard that the people of Naples are perhaps a little jealous over my visit, but I want to assure the people of Naples that I will definitely go there this year.

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