The Holy See

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

JUBILEE FOR CATECHISTS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 25 September 2016

[Multimedia]

In the second reading the Apostle Paul offers to Timothy, but also to us, some advice which is close to his heart. Among other things, he charges him "to keep *the commandment* unstained and free from reproach" (*1 Tim* 6:14). He speaks simply of a commandment. It seems that he wants to keep our attention fixed firmly on what is *essential* for our faith. Saint Paul, indeed, is not suggesting all sorts of different points, but is emphasizing the core of the faith. This centre around which everything revolves, this beating heart which gives life to everything is the Paschal proclamation, the first proclamation: the Lord Jesus is risen, the Lord Jesus loves you, and he has given his life for you; risen and alive, he is close to you and waits for you every day. We must never forget this. On this *Jubilee for Catechists*, we are being asked not to tire of keeping the key message of the faith front and centre: the Lord is risen. Nothing is more important; nothing is clearer or more relevant than this. Everything in the faith becomes beautiful when linked to this centrepiece, if it is saturated by the Paschal proclamation. If it remains in isolation, however, it loses its sense and force. We are called always to live out and proclaim the newness of the Lord's love: "Jesus truly loves you, just as you are. Give him space: in spite of the disappointments and wounds in your life, give him the chance to love you. He will not disappoint you".

The commandment which Saint Paul is speaking of makes us think also of Jesus' new commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn* 15:12). It is by loving that the God-who-is-Love is proclaimed to the world: not by the power of convincing, never by imposing the truth, no less by growing fixated on some religious or moral obligation. God is proclaimed

through the encounter between persons, with care for their history and their journey. Because the Lord is not an idea, but a living person: his message is passed on through simple and authentic testimony, by listening and welcoming, with joy which radiates outward. We do not speak convincingly about Jesus when we are sad; nor do we transmit God's beauty merely with beautiful homilies. The God of hope is proclaimed by living out the Gospel of love in the present moment, without being afraid of testifying to it, even in new ways.

This Sunday's Gospel helps us understand what it means to love, and more than anything how to avoid certain risks. In the parable there is a rich man who does not notice Lazarus, a poor man who was "at his gate" (*Lk* 16:20). This rich man, in fact, does not do evil towards anyone; nothing says that he is a bad man. But he has a sickness much greater than Lazarus', who was "full of sores" (ibid.): this rich man suffers from terrible *blindness*, because he is not able to look beyond his world, made of banquets and fine clothing. He cannot see beyond the door of his house to where Lazarus lies, because what is happening outside does not interest him. He does not see with his eyes, because he cannot feel with his heart. For into it a *worldliness* has entered which anaesthetizes the soul. This worldliness is like a "black hole" that swallows up what is good, which extinguishes love, because it consumes everything in its very self. And so here a person sees only outward appearances, no longer noticing others because one has become indifferent to everyone. The one who suffers from grave blindness often takes on "squinting" behaviour: he looks with adulation at famous people, of high rank, admired by the world, yet turns his gaze away from the many Lazaruses of today, from the poor, from the suffering who are the Lord's beloved.

But the Lord looks at those who are neglected and discarded by the world. Lazarus is the only one named in all of Jesus' parables. His name means "God helps". God does not forget him; he will welcome him to the banquet in his kingdom, together with Abram, in communion with all who suffer. The rich man in the parable, on the other hand, does not even have a name; his life passes by forgotten, because whoever lives for himself does not write history. And a Christian must write history! He or she must go out from themselves, to write history! But whoever lives for themselves cannot write history. Today's callousness causes chasms to be dug that can never be crossed. And we have fallen, at this time, into the sickness of indifference, selfishness and worldliness.

There is another detail in the parable, a contrast. The opulent life of this nameless man is described as being ostentatious: everything about him concerns needs and rights. Even when he is dead he insists on being helped and demands what is to his benefit. Lazarus' poverty, however, is articulated with great dignity: from his mouth no complaints or protests or scornful words issue. This is a valuable teaching: as servants of the word of Jesus we have been called not to parade our appearances and not to seek for glory; nor can we be sad or full of complaints. We are not prophets of gloom who take delight in unearthing dangers or deviations; we are not people who become ensconced in our own surroundings, handing out bitter judgments on our society, on the Church, on everything and everyone, polluting the world with our negativity. Pitiful scepticism

does not belong to whoever is close to the word of God.

Whoever proclaims the hope of Jesus carries joy and sees a great distance; such persons have the horizon open before them; there is no wall closing them in; they see a great distance because they know how to see beyond evil and beyond their problems. At the same time, they see clearly from up close, because they are attentive to their neighbour and to their neighbour's needs. The Lord is asking this of us today: before all the Lazaruses whom we see, we are called to be disturbed, to find ways of meeting and helping, without always delegating to others or saying: "I will help you tomorrow; I have no time today, I'll help you tomorrow". This is a sin. The time taken to help others is time given to Jesus; it is love that remains: it is our treasure in heaven, which we earn here on earth.

And so, dear catechists, dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord give us the grace to be renewed every day by the joy of the first proclamation to us: Jesus died and is risen, Jesus loves us personally! May he give us the strength to live and proclaim the commandment of love, overcoming blindness of appearances, and worldly sadness. May he make us sensitive to the poor, who are not an afterthought in the Gospel but an important page, always open before all.

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