The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL PASTORAL CONGRESS
ON THE WORLD'S BIG CITIES

Consistory Hall
Thursday, 27 November 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers,

I thank you for your participation in this meeting, which reconnects to the preparations made last May in Barcelona. I thank Cardinal Sistach for his words of introduction.

Rather than delivering a formal address — partly because I would like to be a little spontaneous and partly because I did not have time to prepare a formal address: between those for Turkey and those for Europe, my plate was full — I will speak to you from the standpoint of my personal experience, as one who has been a pastor in a heavily populated and multicultural city like Buenos Aires. And also about the experience that we had together as bishops of the 11 dioceses comprising that ecclesiastic region; with them, starting from diverse fields and proposals, we sought in ecclesial communion to address several pastoral aspects for the evangelization of that conurbation with a population of 13 million people among all 11 dioceses: Buenos Aires has 3 million at night and almost 8 [million] who come to the city during the day. But there are 13 million all together. It ranks 13th among the world's most densely populated cities. In reflecting with you, I would like to enter into this "flow" in order to open new roads, I would also like to help sift through possible fears, which many times, in one way or another, we all experience and which confuse us and paralyze us.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, I wanted to draw attention to urban pastoral care, but without opposing rural pastoral care. This is an excellent opportunity to delve into the challenges and possible horizons of urban pastoral care. Challenges, meaning the places where God is calling us; horizons, meaning the aspects to which I think we need to pay special attention. I will recount only four of them, but you will certainly discover others!

1. First, perhaps the most difficult: implementing change in our pastoral mentality. It has to change!

In the cities we need other “maps”, other paradigms, which can help us to rearrange our thoughts and our attitudes. We cannot remain confused, because this uneasiness leads us to take the wrong path, primarily us, but it then confuses the People of God and those who, with a sincere heart, seek Life, Truth and Meaning.

We come from a centuries-old pastoral practice, in which the Church has been the single point of reference for culture. It’s true, it is our legacy. As the authentic Teacher, she felt the responsibility to outline and impose, not only the cultural forms, but also values, and to more profoundly trace the personal and collective imagination, in other words the histories, the cornerstones that people lean on to find the ultimate meanings and answers to their essential questions.

We are no longer in that time. It has past. We are no longer in Christianity, no more. Today we are no longer the only ones who produce culture, nor the first, nor the most listened to. We therefore need a change in pastoral mentality, but not to “relativistic pastoral care” — no, not this — which, for wanting to be present in the “cultural laboratory”, loses the evangelical horizon, leaving man in his own hands and emancipated from the hand of God. No, not this. This is the relativistic path, the most convenient. This cannot be called pastoral care! Those who do this have no genuine concern for man, but leave him at the mercy of two equally grave dangers: they hide Jesus from him and the truth about man himself. Hiding Jesus and the truth about man are grave dangers! This path leads man to the solitude of death (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93-97).

It is necessary to have the courage to be a bold and fearless pastoral evangelizer, because men, women, families and the different groups living in the cities expect from us and need the Good News which is Jesus and his Gospel. I have so often heard it said that one is ashamed to expose oneself. We must work in order not to be ashamed or reluctant in proclaiming Jesus Christ; to seek the how.... This is key for the task.

2. Dialogue with multiculturality. In Strasbourg I spoke about a multipolar Europe. But big cities are also multipolar and multicultural. And we have to dialogue with this reality, without fear. It means developing a pastoral dialogue without relativism, which does not negotiate one’s Christian identity, but which seeks to reach the heart of the other, of others different from us, and there to sow the Gospel.

We need a contemplative approach that, without rejecting the contribution of the various sciences in order to understand the urban phenomenon — these are important contributions — seeks to uncover the foundation of cultures, which at their deepest core are always open and thirsting for God. It will really help us to get acquainted with the imaginary and the invisible cities, that is, the groups or the human territories which are identified in their symbols, languages, rites and forms in

order to narrate life. I think so often about the creativity and the courage that Paul had in his discourse in Athens. The poor man, it didn't go so well.... But he was creative, because he stopped at the idols.... Let us place ourselves in the Judeo-Christian mentality. He entered their culture.... It was unsuccessful, of course, but the creativity! He tried to understand that multiculturality, which was far from the the Judeo-Christian mentality.

3. The third aspect is the religiosity of the people. God lives in the cities. It is necessary to go and look for Him, and to stop there, where He is at work. I know it is not the same thing on the various continents, but we have to uncover, in the religiosity of our peoples, the authentic religious substratum, which in many cases is Christian and Catholic. Not in all: there are non Christian religiosities. But it is necessary to go there, to the core. We must neither fail to appreciate nor disregard this experience of God which, while sometimes being dispersed or blended, calls to be discovered and not built. It is there that the *semina Verbi* are sown by the Spirit of the Lord. It is not good to make hasty and general assessments such as: "This is only an expression of natural religiosity". No, this cannot be said! That is where we can begin the dialogue of evangelization, as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman and surely with many others beyond Galilee. A consciousness of one's own Christian identity and also empathy for the other person are necessary for the dialogue of evangelization. I think I have said this to you, to the Bishops of Asia, have I not? That empathy in order to find this underlayer in religiosity.

The Church in Latin America and in the Caribbean, for several decades, has realized this religious power, which comes above all from the poor majority.

God continues to speak to us today, as He has always done, through the poor, through those "leftovers". In general today, big cities are inhabited by numerous migrants, who come from rural areas or from other continents, with other cultures. Even Rome.... The Vicar of Rome could perhaps confirm? So many homeless people everywhere.... They are pilgrims of life, in search of "salvation", who often have the strength to go forward and fight thanks to the ultimate sense they receive from a simple and profound experience of faith in God. The challenge is twofold: to be hospitable toward the poor and the migrants — in general, cities aren't, they reject! — and to value their faith. It is quite probable that this faith may be mixed with elements of immanentist and magical thinking, but we must look for it, recognize it, interpret it and certainly also evangelize to it. I have no doubt that in the faith of these men and women there is an enormous potential for evangelization of the urban areas.

4. Fourth — continuing on —: the urban poor. Cities, along with the multiplicity of precious offers for life, have consequences that cannot be hidden and that in many cities are increasingly evident: the poor, the outcast, the thrown away. Today we can talk about the thrown away. The Church cannot ignore their cry, nor get involved with unjust, narrow-minded and interested systems who try to make them invisible.

So many poor people, victims of old and new forms of poverty. There are new forms of poverty! Structural and endemic poverty are excluding generations of families. Economic, social, moral and spiritual poverty. Poverty that emarginates and throws away people, children of God. In the cities, the future of poor people is more poverty. Go there!

A few proposals

I propose two pastoral cores to you; they are actions but not only that. I think pastoral care is more than action, it is also presence, contents, attitudes, gestures.

The first thing: *Go out and facilitate*

This is a genuine ecclesial transformation with a missionary focus. A change in mentality: from receiving to going out, from waiting for them to come to going out to find them. To me, this is key!

Go out to encounter God who lives in the city and in the poor. Go out to meet, to listen, to bless, to walk with the people. And facilitate the encounter with the Lord. Make the Sacrament of Baptism accessible. Open Churches. Offices open for working people. Catecheses with suitable contents and schedules for the city.

It is easier for us to help faith grow than to help it be born. I think we have to continue to deepen those necessary changes in our various catecheses, essentially in our teaching forms, so that the contents may be better understood, but at the same time it is necessary to learn to reawaken in our interlocutors curiosity and interest in Jesus Christ. This curiosity has a patron saint: it's Zacchaeus. Let us ask him to help us reawaken it. And then then to invite to conform to Him and follow Him. We must learn to evoke faith! Evoke the faith! Then, not to wander here and there.... No! Sow! If faith begins the Spirit must then ensure that this person turns to me or turns to another to ask for a step further, a step further.... Evoke faith.

Second proposal: *Be the Samaritan Church*.

This means a change in the significance of testimony. In urban pastoral care, quality will come from the capacity of the Church and of every Christian to bear witness. When Pope Benedict said that the Church does not grow through proselytism but through attraction, he was speaking about this. Witness which attracts, which arouses people's curiosity.

Here is the key. Through testimony we can affect the deepest core, where culture is born. Through testimony the Church sows the mustard seed, but she does so in the very heart of the cultures being generated in the cities. Concrete testimony of mercy and kindness that seeks to be present in the existential and poor peripheries, acts directly on the imagination of society, creating direction and meaning for life and for the city. Thus, as Christians we contribute to building a city in justice,

in solidarity and in peace.

With social pastoral care, with *Caritas*, with different organizations, as the Church has always done throughout the centuries, we can take on the burden of the poorest people through meaningful actions, actions that render present the Kingdom of God, manifesting and expanding it. Also by learning and working together with those who are doing very effective things to benefit the poorest people. It is such a productive area of charitable ecumenical pastoral care, in which we make commitments to serve the poorest along with brothers and sisters of other Churches and ecclesial communities. The leading role of lay people and of the poor themselves is very important in all of this. As well as the freedom of lay people, for what imprisons us, what does not allow the doors to open, is the sickness of clericalism. It is one of the most serious problems.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is what my reflection on pastoral experience suggested to me. It gives me joy to think that we are following a path together, and that we do so in the footsteps of so many holy pastors who came before us; I am referring only to the example of Blessed Giovanni Battista Montini, who during his episcopate in Milan, managed the great city mission with passionate zeal. In the writings of Blessed Paulvi, when he was Archbishop of Milan, there was a boatload, a boatload of things that could help with this. May their example and their intercession, with that of our Heavenly Mother, help us to bring about a fruitful change in mentality, to enhance our capacity to dialogue with different cultures, to value the religiosity of our peoples, and to share the Gospel and bread with the poorest of our cities. Thank you.

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