



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO CHILE AND PERU

(15-22 JANUARY 2018)

**MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS
AND SEMINARIANS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCES OF NORTHERN PERU**

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Saints Carlos and Marcelo Seminary College (Trujillo)

Saturday, 20 January 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Good afternoon!

[Loud applause] Since the custom is to clap at the end, it means I'm already finished and can go! [they reply: "No!"] I am grateful for the words of greeting that Archbishop José Antonio Eguren Anselmi of Piura addressed to me in the name of all who are here.

Meeting with you, getting to know you, listening to you and sharing our love for the Lord and the mission he has given us is very important. I know you have made great efforts to be here. Thank you!

This Seminary College that welcomes us was one of the first to be founded in Latin America for the formation of future generations of evangelizers. Being together in this place makes us realize that we are in one of those "cradles" that have produced countless missionaries. Nor can I forget that Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo, the patron of the Latin American bishops, died in this land, in the midst of his missionary activity – not sat behind a desk. All this invites us to look to our roots, to what enables us through time and the unfolding of history to grow and to bear fruit. Root. Without

roots there are no flowers, no fruits. A poet once said: “every fruit that a tree has comes from what is has beneath the soil”, roots. Our vocations will always have that double dimension: roots in the earth and hearts in heaven. Never forget this. When one of these two is missing, something begins to go wrong and our life gradually withers (cf. *Lk 13:6-9*), like the tree that has no roots, withers. I tell you that it is sad to see a bishop, priest, nun, wither. I am even more saddened when I see seminarians wither. This is very serious. The Church is good, the Church is mother and if you see that you cannot, please speak up before it’s too late, before you realize that you have no longer have roots and that you are withering away; there is still time to be saved, because Jesus came for this, to save, and he called us to save.

I like to point out that our faith, our vocation, is one of *remembrance*, that “deuteronomic” dimension of life. One of remembrance, because it recognizes that neither life, nor faith, nor the Church began with the birth of any one of us. Remembrance looks to the past in order to discover the sap that nourished the hearts of disciples for centuries, and thus comes to recognize God’s presence in the life of his people. We remember the promise he made to our forebears and that, by his continuing presence in our midst, he is the cause of the joy that makes us sing: “The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad” (*Ps 125:3*).

I would like to share with you some of the virtues, or some aspects, if you like, of this remembrance. When I say “I want to be a bishop, a priest, a religious sister, a seminarian to have remembrance” what do I mean? That is what I want to share with you now.

1. *One aspect is a joyful self-awareness. We must not be inconsistent with ourselves, no. To be aware of what is happening to us but joyful self-awareness.*

The Gospel that we have heard (cf. *Jn 1:35-42*) is usually read in a vocational key, and so we concentrate on the disciples’ encounter with Jesus. Yet I would like to go back even earlier, and take a look at John the Baptist. He was with two of his disciples, and seeing Jesus pass by, he told them: “Behold the Lamb of God” (*Jn 1:36*). On hearing this, what happened? They left John and followed the other (cf. v. 37). This is somewhat surprising, since they had been with John, they knew that he was a good man, and that, as Jesus would say, of those born of woman none was greater than he (*Mt 11:11*), yet he was not the one who was to come. John was waiting for someone greater than himself. He clearly understood that he was not the Messiah, but simply the herald of his coming. John remembered; he was mindful of the promise and of his own place in history. He was famous, all came to be baptized by him, they listened to him with respect. The people believed that he was the Messiah, but he had remembrance of his own past and did not allow himself to be deceived by the incense of vanity.

John embodies the awareness of a disciple conscious that he is not, and never will be, the Messiah, but only one called to point out the Lord’s presence in the life of his people. I’m struck how God allows the ultimate consequences of this: he dies with his head cut off in a prison cell,

that simple. As consecrated men and women, we are not called to supplant the Lord by our own works, our missions, or our countless activities. When I speak of consecrated persons I am speaking of all: bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, religious and seminarians. All that we are asked to do is to work with the Lord, side by side, never forgetting that we do not replace him. This does not make us “slacken” in the work of evangelization; rather, it impels us to work all the harder, ever mindful that we are disciples of the one Master. A disciple knows that he or she is there, now and always, to support the Master. That is the source of our joy, a joyful self-awareness.

It is good to know that we are not the Messiah! It frees us from thinking that we are overly important or too busy (in some places it is not uncommon to hear people say: “No, don’t go to that parish because the pastor is always busy!”). John the Baptist knew that his mission was to point the way, to make beginnings, to open up spaces, to proclaim that “another” was the bearer of God’s Spirit. To be a people of remembrance frees us from the temptation of thinking that we are messiahs.

We can fight this temptation in many ways, but also with laughter. It has been said of a religious who I liked very much – a Dutch Jesuit who died last year – that he has such a sense of humour that he was able to make light of everything that happened to him, able to make light of himself, and even of his own shadows. Joyful self-awareness. Learning to laugh at ourselves gives us the spiritual ability to stand before Lord with our limitations, our mistakes and our sins, but also our successes, and the joy of knowing that he is at our side. A good spiritual test is to ask ourselves whether we can laugh at ourselves. To laugh at others is easy, true? To criticize them and laugh at them, but it is much harder to laugh at ourselves. Laughter saves us from the “self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others”.^[1] Laugh. Laugh in community, and not at the community or at others! Let us be on guard against people so important that they have forgotten to smile in their lives. “Yes father, but you are not offering me a solution, something to...”. Let me tell you, I have two pills that help a lot: one, speak to Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, prayer, pray and ask for the grace of joy, the joy in the midst of a situation; the second pill you can take various times a day only if you need it, yet once is enough, look at yourself in the mirror: “Is that me? That’s me? Ha ha ha”. This makes you laugh. This is not narcissism, quite the contrary, the mirror here serves as a cure. The first aspect then is joy, joyful awareness of self.

2. *The second aspect of the time of the call, to own the time of the call.*

John the Evangelist mentions in his Gospel the time when his life changed. Yes, when the Lord makes a person grow in awareness that he or she is called... there is the memory of when it all started: “it was about the tenth hour” (Jn 1:39). An encounter with Jesus changes our lives, it establishes a “before” and an “after”. It is always good to remember the hour, that special day when each of us realized, truly realized that “this impulse” was not a whim or a mere attraction but

rather the Lord expecting something more of us. And this is where we can remember: that day I realized. The memory of that hour in which we were touched by his gaze.

When we forget that hour, we forget our origins, our roots; and by losing these basic coordinates, we lose sight of the most precious part of our lives as consecrated persons: the Lord's gaze: "No father, I look at the Lord in the tabernacle". That is good but sit down a while and allow him to look at you and remember those times he looked at you and looks at you. Allow yourselves to receive his gaze. This is the most precious possession of a consecrated person: the Lord's gaze.

Perhaps you don't like the place where the Lord found you, perhaps it wasn't an ideal situation, or "it could have been better". But it was there that he found you and healed your wounds, there.

Each of us knows where and when: perhaps it was a time of complicated situations, of painful situations; yes, but it was there that the God of Life met you and made you a witness to his Life, a part of his mission and, in union with him, to be his caress for many people. We do well to remember that our vocations are a loving call to love in return, and to serve. Not to take a slice of the cake for us. If the Lord fell in love with you and chose you, it was not because you were more numerous than the others, for you are the least of peoples, but out of love! (cf. *Deut 7:7-8*). This is what the people of Israel were told in Deuteronomy. Don't put on airs. You are not the most important of peoples; you are not so great. Yet that was the people that he fell in love with. So what do you want? The Lord does not have good taste, but he fell in love with them... His is a visceral love, a merciful love that impels us in the depths of our being to go out and serve others as Jesus did. Not according to the way of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Doctors of the Law, the Zealots, no, no, they looked for their own glory.

I would like to emphasize one aspect that I consider important. Many of us, when we entered the seminary, the house of formation or the novitiate, were shaped by the faith of our families and neighbours. That is where we learned to pray, from our mother, grandmother, aunt... and later it was the catechist who prepared us... and this is how we took our first steps, frequently sustained by displays of popular piety and spirituality, which in Peru have taken on the most exquisite forms and have deep roots in God's simple and faithful people. Your people have demonstrated an immense love of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and your saints and blessed, in so great a number of devotions that I dare not name them for fear of leaving some of them out. In their shrines, "many pilgrims make decisions that mark their lives. The walls [of those shrines] contain many stories that millions could tell of conversion, forgiveness, and gifts received".^[2] For many of you, the story of your vocation could also be written on those walls. I urge you please not to forget, much less look down on, the solid and simple faith of your people. Welcome, accompany and stimulate their encounter with the Lord. Do not become "professionals of the sacred" by forgetting your people, from whose midst the Lord took you, from among the sheep as the Lord tells his anointed [David] in the Bible. Do not lose your remembrance and respect for those who taught you how to pray.

It has happened to me to receive a similar question from meetings with male and female Masters

of Novices and from Rectors and Spiritual Directors of Seminaries: “How do we teach those who enter to pray?” They give them some manuals on learning how to pray – I got one when I entered. “Do this here” or “don’t do that”, or “first you must do this”, “then take the next step”... Generally, the wisest men and women entrusted with responsibility for novices, and Spiritual Directors and Rectors in Seminaries, should say: “Carry on praying as you were taught at home”. Then, gradually, you can move them onto other ways of prayer. But, “carry on praying as your mother taught you, as your grandmother taught you”, which is also the advice that Saint Paul gives to Timothy: “the faith of your mother and grandmother, that is the one you have and must follow”. Do not overlook the prayer acquired at home because it is the strongest. Remembering the moment of our call, rejoicing in the memory of Christ’s entrance into our lives, will help us to say that beautiful prayer of Saint Francisco Solano, the great preacher and friend of the poor: “My good Jesus, my redeemer and my friend! What do I have, that you have not given me? What do I know, that you have not taught me?”

In this way, a religious, a priest, a consecrated woman or man, a seminarian is a person of remembrance, joy and gratitude: three things we need to appropriate and keep as “weapons” against all vocational pretense. Grateful awareness enlarges the heart and inspires us to service. Without gratitude, we can be efficient dispensers of sacred things, but we will lack the anointing of the Spirit to become servants of our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. The faithful People of God have a sense of smell that enables them to distinguish a functionary of the sacred from a grateful servant. They are able to distinguish someone who is mindful from someone who is not. The People of God are patient, but they also know who serves and heals their wounds with the balm of joy and gratitude. In this allow yourselves to be guided by the People of God. In parishes it sometimes happens that when the priest gets distracted a little and forgets his people – I am speaking about real things here, true enough? – how often does the old lady in the sacristy, who we call “la vieja de la sacristía” (“the elderly sacristan lady”) say to the priest: “Father, how long is it since you last you’re your mother? Go and see her; we can manage for a week with the Rosary.

3. *The third aspect, Contagious joy. Joy is contagious when it is real.*

Andrew was one of the disciples of John the Baptist who followed Jesus that day. After spending time with Jesus and seeing where he lived, he returned to the house of his brother Simon Peter and told him: “We have found the Messiah” (Jn 1:41). That’s where it was passed on contagiously. That was the greatest news he could give him, and it brought him to Jesus. Faith in Jesus is contagious. And if there is a priest, a bishop, a nun, a seminarian, consecrated man or woman who is not been contaminated by joy is sterile, a laboratory worker. Let that person dirty their hands a little and begin to be contaminated by the love of Jesus. Faith in Jesus is contagious, it cannot be restrained or kept within. Here we see how witness becomes fruitful: the newly called disciples go on to attract others by their testimony of faith, just as Jesus, in the Gospel passage, calls us through others. The mission springs spontaneously from the encounter

with Christ. Andrew begins his apostolate with those closest to him, with his brother Simon, almost naturally, by radiating joy. Joy is the surest sign that we have “discovered” the Messiah. Contagious joy is a constant in the hearts of the apostles, and we see it in the enthusiasm with which Andrew tells his brother: “We have found him!” For “the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and the lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew”.^[3] And this is contagious.

This joy opens us up to others; it is a joy not to be kept but shared. In the fragmented world in which we live, a world that can make us withdrawn, we are challenged to become builders and prophets of community. You know that no one is saved alone. I would like to be clear about this. Fragmentation or isolation are not things that just happen “out there”, as if only a problem with the “world”. Brothers and sisters, divisions, wars and isolation are found within our communities, within are Presbyteries, within our Episcopal Conferences, and what harm they bring us! Jesus sends us out to build communion and unity, yet often it seems we go about this by displaying our disunity and, worse yet, trying to trip each other up. Am I wrong? [They reply: “No!”] Let us hang our heads in shame and take responsibility for our own share of the blame. We are called to be builders of communion and unity, but this does not mean thinking everyone is the same, or doing things always the same way. It means discerning what everyone has to offer, respecting their differences, and acknowledging the gift of charisms within the Church, knowing that while each of us contributes what he or she has, we also need one another. Only the Lord has the fullness of the gifts; only he is the Messiah. He wanted to distribute his gifts in such a way that we can give what is ours while being enriched by that of others. We must be on guard against the temptation of the “only child”, who wants everything for himself because there is no one to share it with. That is a spoilt child. I ask those of you who are in positions of authority: please not to become self-referential. Try to care for your brothers and sisters; try to keep them happy, because happiness is contagious. Do not fall into the trap of an authority that turns into authoritarianism by forgetting that its mission is primarily one of service. Those who have the mission of authority must think about this a lot. In the army there are enough sergeants; we don’t need them in our communities.

Before ending: please be men and women of remembrance and go back to the roots. I think it is important that in our communities, presbyteries, the flame of memory be kept alive, encouraging dialogue between the youngest and the oldest. The oldest are full of remembrance and pass these memories onto us. We must go out to receive this, let us not abandon them. They [the elderly], over there, they that don’t speak much, they that feel a somewhat abandoned... Let us invite them to speak, especially the young must do this. Those who are in charge of forming the young; send them out to speak to the elderly priests, the elderly nuns, the elderly bishops – they say that nuns don’t get old because they are eternal – send the young out to enter into dialogue. The elderly need to regain the sparkle in their eyes and to see that in the Church, among the clergy, in the Episcopal Conference, in the Convent, there are young men and women who are moving the Body of Christ forwards. Let them listen to the young and let the young ask the elderly

questions. That's when the sparkle is regained in their own eyes. That's when they will begin to dream. Make the elderly dream. Joel's prophecy, 3:1. Make the elderly dream. If the young do this, I assure you that the elderly will then make the young prophesy.

Go back to the roots. I want – and I am ending – to quote a Holy Father, but I cannot think of one. But I will quote an Apostolic Nuncio. He told me, speaking about this matter, an old African saying that he learnt when he was there – because Apostolic Nuncios first go to Africa where they learn a lot – and the saying is: “The young walk quickly, and they have to do so, but it is the elderly that know the way”. Understood?

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once more. May this “deuteronomic” remembrance make us more joyful and grateful to be servants of unity in the midst of our people. Allow the Lord to gaze upon you, search for the Lord, there, in your memories. Look at the mirror now and again.

May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And now and again, as they say in the countryside, throw me a prayer. Thank you.

[1]Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 94.

[2]Cf. Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 260.

[3] *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.