

CATECHESSES
ON
THE CHURCH

(18 June – 26 November 2014)

POPE FRANCIS

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— CHAPTER I —

God Forms a People

*St. Peter's Square
Wednesday, 18 June 2014*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

And my compliments because you have been very good, in this weather when you don't know whether it is going to rain or not... *Bravi!* Let's hope to finish the audience without water, that the Lord has pity on us.

Today I begin a new series of catecheses on the Church. It is a little like a child speaking of his own mother, his family. To speak of the Church is to speak of our mother, of our family. The Church, in fact, is not an institution focused in on itself or a private association, an NGO, and even less should it restrict its gaze to the clergy or to the Vatican. "The Church thinks...". But the Church is all of us! "Who are you speaking about?" "No, about priests...". Ah, priests are part of the Church, but the Church is all of us! Don't restrict her to priests, bishops, the Vatican.... These are members of the Church, but the Church is all of us, the whole family, everyone from the mother. And the Church is a very broad reality, which is open to the whole of humanity and is not created in a laboratory, the Church is not born in a lab, she is not born suddenly. She is founded by Jesus, a people with a long history on her

shoulders and a preparation that began long before Christ himself.

1. You find the Church's history, or rather "prehistory", already in the pages of the Old Testament. We heard from the Book of Genesis: God chose Abraham, our father in faith, and asks him to depart, to leave his homeland and set out for another land, which He himself would indicate (cf. Gn 12:1-9). And in this vocation God did not call Abraham alone, as an individual, but involved from the start his family, his household and all those in service to his house. Once on the path, — yes, like this the Church begins to walk — then, God will broaden the horizon still more and will shower Abraham with his blessing, promising him descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and as grains of sand on the shore. The first important date is precisely this: starting from Abraham God forms a people to carry his blessing to all the families of the earth. And it is within this people that Jesus is born. It is God who fashions this people, this history, the journeying Church, and there Jesus is born, in this people.

2. A second element: it is not Abraham who builds about himself a people, but God who gives life to this people. Usually it was man who turned to the divinity, seeking to bridge the gap and invoking aid and protection. The people prayed to gods, divinities. In this case, however, something unheard of happens: it is God himself who takes the initiative. Let us hear this: it is God himself

who knocks at Abraham's door and says to him: go forth, leave your land, begin to walk and I will make of you a great people. And this is the beginning of the Church and within this people Jesus is born. God takes the initiative and turns his word to man, creating a bond and a new relationship with him. "But, Father, how can this be? God speaks to us?" "Yes". "And we can speak to God?" "Yes". "But can we have a conversation with God?" "Yes". This is called prayer, but it is God who started it all. Thus, God forms a people with all those who listen to his Word and set themselves on the journey, trusting in Him. This is the only condition: to trust in God. If you trust in God, listen to him and set out on the journey, this is building the Church. The love of God *precedes* everything. God is always first, He arrives before us, He precedes us. The Prophet Isaiah, or Jeremiah, I don't remember, said that God is like an almond blossom, because it is the first tree to flower in spring. Meaning that God always flowers before us. When we arrive He is waiting for us, He calls us, He makes us walk. Always anticipating us. And this is called love, because God always waits for us. "But, Father, I don't believe this, because if you only knew, Father; my life was so horrible, how can I think that God is waiting for me?" "God is waiting for you. And if you were a great sinner He is waiting for you even more and waiting for you with great love, because He is first. This is the beauty of the Church, who leads us to this God who is waiting

for us! He precedes Abraham, He precedes even Adam.

3. Abraham and his own listen to the call of God and set out on the journey, despite not knowing well who this God is and where He wants to lead them. It's true, because Abraham sets out on the journey entrusting himself to this God who spoke to him, yet he had no theology book to study what this God might be. He trusts, he trusts in love. God makes him feel love and he trusts. This however does not mean that the people were always firm and faithful. Indeed, from the outset there is resistance, retreating into themselves and their own interests and the temptation to bargain with God and resolve matters in their own way. And these are the betrayals and sins that mark the journey of the people throughout all of salvation history, which is *the history of the faithfulness of God and the infidelity of his people*. God, however, does not tire, God has patience, He has a great deal of patience, and in time continues to educate and to form His people, as a father with His own child. God walks with us. The Prophet Hosea says: "I have walked with you and I taught you how to walk as a father teaches his child to walk". It's beautiful, this image of God! And this is He with us: He teaches us to walk. And it is the same attitude He maintains towards the Church. We too despite our resolve to follow the Lord Jesus, experience everyday the selfishness and hardness of our heart. When however we recognize ourselves as sinners, God fills us with

His mercy and with His love. And He forgives us, He always forgives us. And it is precisely this that makes us grow as God's people, as the Church: not our cleverness, not our merits — we are a small thing, it's not that — but the daily experience of how much the Lord wishes us well and takes care of us. It is this that makes us feel that we are truly His, in His hands, and makes us grow in communion with Him and with one another. To be Church is to feel oneself in the hands of God, who is father and loves us, caresses us, waits for us and makes us feel His tenderness. And this is very beautiful!

Dear friends, this is God's plan; when He called Abraham, God was thinking of this: to form people blessed in His love and that they might carry His blessing to all nations of the earth. This plan does not change, it is always in action. In Christ it found fulfillment and today still God continues to realize it in the Church. Let us ask then for the grace to remain faithful to following the Lord Jesus and to listening to his Word, ready to set out every day, like Abraham, towards the land of God and of man, our true homeland, and thus to become the blessing, the sign of God's love for all His children. I like to think that a synonym, another name that we Christians could be called is this: we are men and women, we are a people who bless. The Christian by his life must bless always, bless God and bless all people. We Christians are a people who bless, who know how to bless. This is a beautiful vocation!

— CHAPTER II —

Belonging to the People of God

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 25 June 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

Today there is another group of pilgrims linked up with us in the Paul VI Hall, they are pilgrims suffering from illnesses. With this weather, between the heat and the possibility of rain, it was more prudent that they stay there. But they are linked with us via maxi screen. And thus we are together at the same audience. And today let us all pray especially for them, for their illnesses. Thank you.

In the first catechesis on the Church, last Wednesday, we began with the initiative of God who wants to form a people to carry his blessing to all the nations of the earth. He begins with Abraham and then, with great patience — and God has that, he has a great deal of that! — he prepares this people of the Old Covenant so that, in Jesus Christ, he will establish it as the sign and instrument of mankind's communion with God and unity with one another (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). Today we would like to pause on the importance for a Christian *to belong* to this people. We will speak about belonging to the Church.

1. We are not isolated and we are not Christians on an individual basis, each one on his or her own, no, *our Christian identity is to belong!* We are Christians because we belong to the Church. It is like a last name: if the first name is “I am Christian”, the last name is “I belong to the Church”. It is so beautiful to observe how this belonging is also expressed in the name God gives to himself. In answer to Moses in that wonderful episode of the “burning bush”, he defines himself as *the God of the fathers* (cf. Ex 3:15). He doesn’t say: I am the Omnipotent One..., no: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*. In this way He reveals himself as the God who made an alliance with our fathers and remains ever faithful to his pact, and calls us to enter into this relationship which precedes us. God’s relationship with his people precedes us all, it comes from that time.

2. In this sense, one’s thought goes in the first place, with gratitude, to *those who went before us* and who welcomed us into the Church. No one becomes Christian on his or her own! Is that clear? No one becomes Christian by him- or herself. Christians are not made in a laboratory. A Christian is part of a people who comes from afar. The Christian belongs to a people called the Church and this Church is what makes him or her Christian, on the day of Baptism, and then in the course of catechesis, and so on. But no one, no one becomes Christian on his or her own. If we believe, if we know how to pray, if we acknowledge the Lord and

can listen to his Word, if we feel him close to us and recognize him in our brothers and sisters, it is because others, before us, lived the faith and then transmitted it to us. We have *received* the faith from our fathers, from our ancestors, and they have instructed us in it. If we think about it carefully, who knows how many beloved faces pass before our eyes at this moment: it could be the face of our parents who requested our Baptism; that of our grandparents or of some family member who taught us how to make the sign of the Cross and to recite our first prayers. I always remember the face of the nun who taught me the Catechism, but she always comes to mind — she is in Heaven for sure, because she was a holy woman — I always remember her and give thanks to God for this sister. Or it could be the face of the parish priest, of another priest or a sister or a catechist, who transmitted the contents of the faith to us and helped us to grow as Christians.... So, this is the Church: one great family, where we are welcomed and learn to live as believers and disciples of the Lord Jesus.

3. We are able to live this journey not only *because of* others, but *together with* others. In the Church there is no “do it yourself”, there are no “free agents”. How many times did Pope Benedict “describe the Church as an ecclesial ‘we’”! At times one hears someone say: “I believe in God, I believe in Jesus, but I don’t care about the Church...”. How many times have we heard this? And this is not good. There are those who believe

they can maintain a personal, direct and immediate relationship with Jesus Christ outside the communion and the mediation of the Church. These are dangerous and harmful temptations. These are, as the great Paul VI said, absurd dichotomies. It is true that walking together is challenging, and at times can be tiring: it can happen that some brother or some sister creates difficulties, or shocks us.... But the Lord entrusted his message of salvation to a few human beings, to us all, to a few witnesses; and it is in our brothers and in our sisters, with their gifts and limitations, that he comes to meet us and make himself known. And this is what it means to belong to the Church. Remember this well: to be Christian means belonging to the Church. The first name is “Christian”, the last name is “belonging to the Church”.

Dear friends, let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, for the grace never to fall into the temptation of thinking we can make it without the others, that we can get along without the Church, that we can save ourselves on our own, of being Christians from the laboratory. On the contrary, you cannot love God without loving your brothers, you cannot love God outside of the Church; you cannot be in communion with God without being so in the Church, and we cannot be good Christians if we are not together with those who seek to follow the Lord Jesus, as one single people, one single body, and this is the Church. Thank you.

— CHAPTER III —

New Covenant and New People

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 6 August 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters Good morning,

In previous Catecheses we saw how the Church constitutes a people, a people prepared with God's love and patience and to which we are all called to belong. Today I would like to highlight the newness which characterizes this people: it truly involves a new people, which is based on the New Covenant, established by the Lord Jesus with the gift of his life. This newness does not deny the previous journey nor does it oppose it, but in fact leads it forth, leads it to fulfillment.

1. There is a very meaningful figure, who acts as a hinge between the Old and New Testaments: that of John the Baptist. According to the Synoptic Gospels he is the "precursor", the one who prepares the coming of the Lord, preparing the people to convert the heart to receive God's comfort already at hand. According to the Gospel of John, he is the "witness", inasmuch as he makes us recognize in Jesus the One who comes from on High, to forgive our sins and to make of his people his Bride, the first fruits of the new humanity. As "precursor" and "witness", John the Baptist plays a role central to the entire Scripture, as he forms the bridge between the Old Testament

promise and its fulfillment, between the prophecies and their realization in Jesus Christ. With his witness John points us to Jesus, invites us to follow him, and tells us without mincing his words that this requires humility, repentance and conversion: it is an invitation that calls for humility, repentance and conversion.

2. As Moses had covenanted with God by virtue of the law received on Mount Sinai, so Jesus, from a hill on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, gives to his disciples and to the crowd a new lesson which begins with the Beatitudes. Moses gives the Law on Mount Sinai and Jesus, the new Moses, gives the Law on that hillside, on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. The Beatitudes are the path that God indicates as the answer to man's innate desire for happiness, and they perfect the Commandments of the Old Covenant. We are accustomed to learning the Ten Commandments — of course, you all know them, you learned them in the Catechesis — but we are not used to repeating the Beatitudes. Let us try however, to remember them and to impress them upon our heart. Let us do one thing: I'll say them one at a time and you'll repeat them. Okay?

First: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". [The people repeat]

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted". [The people repeat]

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. [The people repeat]

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. I’ll help you: [repeats with the people]. “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you”. [The people repeat]

Very good! But let’s do one thing: I’m giving you homework, an assignment to do at home. Take the Gospel, the one you carry with you.... Remember

that you should always carry a little Gospel with you, in your pocket, purse, always; the one you have at home. Carry the Gospel, and in the first Chapters of Matthew — I believe in five — there are the Beatitudes. And today, tomorrow at home, read them. Will you do it? [The people answer: “Yes”!] So as not to forget them, because it is the Law that Jesus gives us! Will you do it? Thank you.

In these words is all the newness that Christ brought, all the newness of Christ is in these words. In fact, the Beatitudes are the portrait of Jesus, his way of life; and they are the path to true happiness, which we too can travel with the grace that Jesus gives us.

3. Besides the New Law, Jesus also gives us the “protocol” by which we will be judged. At the end of the world we will be judged. And what questions will we be asked there? What will these questions be? What is the protocol by which the judge will evaluate us? We find it in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. Today the assignment is to read the fifth Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew where the Beatitudes are; and read the 25th Chapter, where the protocol is, the questions that we will be asked on Judgement Day. We will not have titles, credit or privileges on which to stake our claims. The Lord will recognize us if, in our turn, we recognized him in the poor, in the hungry, in the indigent and the outcast, in those who suffer and are alone.... This is one of the

fundamental criteria for evaluating our Christian life, which Jesus calls us to measure up to every day. I read the Beatitudes and I think of how my Christian life should be, and then I examine my conscience with this Chapter 25 of Matthew. Every day: I did this, I did this, I did this.... It will do us good! They are simple but concrete things.

Dear friends, the New Covenant consists exactly in this: in recognizing oneself, in Christ, enveloped in God's mercy and compassion. This is what fills our heart with joy, and this is what makes our life a beautiful and credible testimony of God's love for all the brothers and sisters we meet everyday. Remember your homework! The fifth Chapter of Matthew and Chapter 25 of Matthew. Thank you!

— CHAPTER IV —

One and Holy

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 27 August 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

Every time we renew our profession of faith by reciting the “Creed”, we affirm that the Church is “one” and “holy”. She is *one*, because her origin is in the Triune God, the mystery of unity and full communion. The Church, then, is *holy*, as she is founded by Jesus Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, showered with his love and his salvation. At the same time, however, she is holy and made up of sinners, all of us, sinners, who experience our fragility and our misery every day. Thus, this faith which we profess urges us toward conversion, to have the courage to live unity and holiness daily, and if we are not united, if we are not holy, it is because we are not faithful to Jesus. But He, Jesus, does not leave us on our own, He does not abandon his Church! He walks with us, He understands us. He understands our weaknesses, our sins, He forgives us always, if we let him forgive us. He is always with us, helping us to become less sinful, more holy, more united.

1. The first reassurance we have comes from the fact that *Jesus prayed so much for the unity of the disciples*. This is the prayer of the Last Supper, Jesus asks: “Father, that they may all be one”. He

prayed for unity, and He actually did so as the Passion was imminent, when He was about to offer His very life for us. That is what we are continually called to reread and meditate on, in one of the most intense and moving passages in Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to John (cf. vv. 11, 21-23). It is so beautiful to know that the Lord, shortly before dying, was not concerned about himself, but was thinking about us! And in his heartfelt dialogue with the Father, He prayed precisely that we might be one with Him and with each other. It is with these words that Jesus made himself our intercessor with the Father, so that we too may enter into full communion of love with Him; at the same time, he entrusts us with his spiritual testimony, so that unity may become ever more the distinctive mark of our Christian communities and the most beautiful response to whomsoever asks us to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

2. “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jn 17:21). The Church has sought from the very start to accomplish this purpose which Jesus had so much at heart. The Acts of the Apostles remind us that the first Christians distinguished themselves by the fact of being “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32); the Apostle Paul, then, exhorted his communities not to forget that they “are one body” (1 Cor 12:13). Experience tells us, however, that *there are so many sins*

against unity. And let us consider not only the schisms, let us consider the very common lapses in our communities, “parochial” sins, those sins in the parishes. Sometimes, in fact, our parishes, called to be places of sharing and communion, are sadly marred by envy, jealousy, antipathy.... And gossip which everyone passes on. There is so much gossip in parishes! It is not good. For example, when one is elected president of that association, they gossip about him. And when another is elected president of Catechesis, the others gossip about her. But this is not the Church. This is not what one should do, we must not do it! We must ask the Lord for the grace not to do it. This happens when we aim for first place; when we place ourselves at the centre, with our personal ambitions and our ways of seeing things, and we judge others; when we look at our brothers faults instead of their talents; when we give more weight to what divides us instead of to what we have in common....

Once, in another diocese I had before, I heard an interesting and kind comment. It was about an older woman who had worked all her life in the parish, and a person who knew her well said: “This woman never criticized, she never gossiped, she always wore a smile”. A woman like this could be canonized tomorrow! This is a good example. And if we look at the history of the Church, there are so many divisions among us Christians. Even now we are divided. Also in history, we Christians have made war among

ourselves for theological differences. Let us think of the 30 Years' War. But, this is not Christian. We must also work for the unity of all Christians, to take the path of unity which is what Jesus wanted and prayed for.

3. In the face of all of this, we must *make a serious examination of conscience*. In a Christian community, *division is one of the gravest sins*, because it makes it a sign not of God's work, but of the devil's work, who is by definition the one who separates, who destroys relationships, who insinuates prejudice.... Division in a Christian community, whether in a school, a parish, or an association, it is a very grave sin, because it is the work of the Devil. God, instead wants us to develop the capacity to welcome, to forgive and to love each other, to be ever more like Him, who is communion and love. The Church's holiness consists in this: in recognizing herself in God's image, showered with his mercy and his grace.

Dear friends, let these words of Jesus resound in our hearts: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). Let us ask sincerely for forgiveness for all the times in which we have caused division or misunderstanding within our communities, knowing well that communion is not achieved except through constant conversion. What is conversion? It is asking the Lord for the grace not to speak ill, not to criticize, not to gossip, to love everyone. It is a grace which the Lord gives us. This is what it

means to convert the heart. And let us ask that the daily fabric of our relationships may become an ever more beautiful and joyous reflection of the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

— CHAPTER V —

The Church is Mother (I)

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 3 September 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

We have pointed out many times in previous catecheses that one does not become Christian by oneself, that is, through one's own effort, autonomously; neither are Christians made in a laboratory, but they are created and they grow in the faith within that great body which is the Church. In this sense the Church is truly mother, our Mother Church — it is beautiful to say it this way: our Mother Church — a mother who gives us life in Christ and who lets us live with all the other brothers and sisters in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

1. In her motherhood, the Church has the Virgin Mary as a model, the most beautiful and most lofty model that there could be. This was already evidenced in the first Christian communities and the Second Vatican Council expressed it in a wonderful way (cf. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 63-64). The motherhood of Mary is surely unique, singular, and was brought about in the fullness of time, when the Virgin gave birth to the Son of God, conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the motherhood of the Church is established in

precise continuity with that of Mary, as her continuation in history. The Church, in the fruitfulness of the Spirit, continues to generate new children in Christ, always listening to the Word of God and in docility to his plan of love. The Church is mother. The conception of Jesus in Mary's womb, in fact, is the prelude to the birth of every Christian in the womb of the Church. From the moment that Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29) and our first brother Jesus was born of Mary. He is the model, and we are all born of the Church.

We understand, then, how the relationship which unites Mary and the Church is so deep: by looking at Mary, we discover the most beautiful and most tender face of the Church; and by looking at the Church, we recognize the sublime features of Mary. We Christians are not orphans, we have a mama, we have a mother, and this is great! We are not orphans! The Church is mother, Mary is mother.

2. The Church is our mother because she has given birth to us in Baptism. Each time we baptize a baby, he or she becomes a child of the Church, who enters the Church. And from that day, like an attentive mama, she helps us grow in faith and she shows us, with the strength of the Word of God, the path of salvation, defending us from harm.

The Church has received from Jesus the precious treasure of the Gospel, not to retain it for herself, but to give it generously to others, as a mama

would do. In this service of evangelization, the Church, committed as a mother, manifests her motherhood in a special way, to offer her children the spiritual nourishment which nurtures and makes the Christian life bear fruit. However, we are all called to receive with an open mind and heart the Word of God which the Church imparts every day, because this Word has the capacity to change us from within. Only the Word of God has this capacity to change us from the inside, from our deepest roots. The Word of God has this power. And who gives us the Word of God? Mother Church. She nurses us from childhood with this Word, she raises us throughout our life with this Word, and this is great! It is actually Mother Church who, with the Word of God, changes us from within. The Word of God which Mother Church gives us transforms us, makes our humanity pulse, not the according to mundane flesh, but according to the Holy Spirit.

In her motherly solicitude, the Church strives to show the believers the path to follow in order to live a fruitful life of joy and peace. Illuminated by the light of the Gospel and supported by the grace of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we can guide our decisions toward the good and withstand with hope and courage the times of darkness and the most tortuous paths. The path of salvation, through which the Church guides us and accompanies us with the strength of the Gospel and the support of the Sacraments, gives us the ability to defend ourselves against evil. The

Church has the courage of a mother who knows she must defend her children against the dangers which arise from Satan's presence in the world, in order to lead them to the encounter with Jesus. A mother always protects her children. This defence also calls for vigilance: to be watchful for the snares and seduction of the Evil One. Because even though Satan was defeated by God, he always returns with his temptations; we know it, we are all tempted, we have been tempted and we are tempted. Satan comes "like a roaring lion" (1 Pt 5:8), the Apostle Peter says, and it is up to us not to be naïve, but to be vigilant and to resist, steadfast in the faith. To resist with the counsel of Mother Church, to resist with the help of Mother Church, who like a good mama always accompanies her children at difficult times.

3. Dear friends, this is the Church, this is the Church we all love, this is the Church I love: a mother who has the good of her children at heart and who is able to give her life for them. We must not forget, however, that the Church is not only the priests, or we bishops, no, she is all of us! The Church is all of us! Agreed? And we too are children, but also mothers of other Christians. All who are baptized, men and women, together we are the Church. So often in our life we do not bear witness of this motherhood of the Church, of this maternal courage of the Church! So often we are cowards! Let us then entrust ourselves to Mary, that She as mother of our firstborn brother, Jesus, may teach us to have the same maternal spirit

toward our brothers and sisters, with the sincere capacity to welcome, to forgive, to give strength and to instil trust and hope. This is what a mother does.

— CHAPTER VI —

**The Church is Mother (II):
She Teaches Works of Mercy**

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 10 September 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters Good morning,

In the course of our catechesis on the Church, we are pausing to consider that the Church *is Mother*. Last time we emphasized that the Church lets us grow and, with the light and the strength of the Word of God, shows us the path of salvation, and defends us from evil. Today I would like to highlight a particular aspect of this educational work of our Mother Church, which is how she *teaches us works of mercy*.

A good educator focuses on the *essential*. She doesn't get lost in details, but passes on what really matters so the child or the student can find the meaning and the joy of life. It's the truth. In the Gospel the essential thing is *mercy*. God sent his Son, God made himself man in order to save us, that is, in order to grant us his mercy. Jesus says this clearly, summarizing his teaching for the disciples: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Can there be a Christian who isn't merciful? No. A Christian must necessarily be merciful, because this is the centre of the Gospel. And faithful to this teaching, the Church can only repeat the same thing to her children: "Be

merciful”, as the Father is, and as Jesus was. Mercy.

And thus the Church conducts herself like Jesus. She does not teach theoretical lessons on love, on mercy. She does not spread to the world a philosophy, a way of wisdom.... Of course, Christianity is also all of this, but as an effect, by reflex. Mother Church, like Jesus, teaches by example, and the words serve to illuminate the meaning of her actions.

Mother Church teaches us to give food and drink to those who are hungry and thirsty, to clothe those who are naked. And how does she do this? She does it through the example of so many saints, men and women, who did this in an exemplary fashion; but she does it also through the example of so many dads and mamas, who teach their children that what we have extra is for those who lack the basic necessities. It is important to know this. The rule of hospitality has always been sacred in the simplest Christian families: there is always a plate and a bed for the one in need. A mother once told me — in the other diocese — that she wanted to teach this to her children and she told them to help and feed those who were hungry. She had three. And one day at lunch — the dad was out working, she was there with her three young children, 7, 5 and 4 years old, more or less — and there came a knock at the door: there was a man who asked for something to eat. And the mama told him: “Wait a moment”. She

went back inside and told her children: “There’s a man there asking for something to eat, what can we do?” “Let’s give him something, Mama, let’s give him something!”. Each of them had a beefsteak and fried potatoes on their plate. “Very well” — the mother said — “let’s take half from each of you, and we’ll give him half of the beefsteak from each of you”. “Oh, no, Mom, that’s not right!”. “That’s how it is, you have to give some of yours”. And this is how this mom taught her children to give food from *their own* plate. This is a fine example that really helped me. “But I don’t have any leftovers...”. “Give some of your own!”. This is what Mother Church teaches us. And you, so many moms who are here, you know what you have to do to teach your children the reason for sharing their things with those in need.

Mother Church teaches us to be close to those who are sick. So many saints served Jesus in this manner! And so many simple men and women, every day, practice this work of mercy in a hospital ward, or in a rest home, or in their own home, assisting a sick person.

Mother Church teaches us to be close to those who are in prison. “But no Father, this is dangerous, those are bad people”. But each of us is capable.... Listen carefully to this: each of us is capable of doing the same thing that that man or that woman in prison did. All of us have the capacity to sin and to do the same, to make mistakes in life. They are

no worse than you and me! Mercy overcomes every wall, every barrier, and leads you to always seek the face of the man, of the person. And it is mercy which changes the heart and the life, which can regenerate a person and allow him or her to integrate into society in a new way.

Mother Church teaches us to be close to those who are neglected and die alone. That is what the blessed Teresa did on the streets of Calcutta; that is what has been and is done by many Christians who are not afraid to hold the hand of someone who is about to leave this world. And here too, mercy gives peace to those who pass away and those who remain, allowing them to feel that God is greater than death, and that abiding in Him even the last parting is a “see you again”.... The blessed Teresa understood this well! They told her: “Mother, this is a waste of time!”. She found people dying on the street, people whose bodies were being eaten by mice on the street, and she took them home so they could die clean, calm, touched gently, in peace. She gave them a “see you again”, to all of them.... And so many men and women like her have done this. And they are awaiting them, there [pointing to heaven], at the gate, to open the gate of Heaven to them. Help people die serenely, in peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is how the Church is Mother, by teaching her children works of mercy. She learned this manner from Jesus, she learned that this is what’s essential for salvation.

It's not enough to love those who love us. Jesus says that pagans do this. It's not enough to do good to those who do good to us. To change the world for the better it is necessary to do good to those who are not able to return the favour, as the Father has done with us, by giving us Jesus. How much have we paid for our redemption? Nothing, totally free! Doing good without expecting anything in return. This is what the Father did with us and we must do the same. Do good and carry on!

How beautiful it is to live in the Church, in our Mother Church who teaches us these things which Jesus taught us. Let us thank the Lord, who has given us the grace of having the Church as Mother, she who teaches us the way of mercy, which is the way of life. Let us thank the Lord.

— CHAPTER VII —

Catholic and Apostolic

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 17 September 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

This week we shall continue to speak about the Church. When we profess our faith, we affirm that the Church is *catholic* and *apostolic*. But what effectively is the meaning of these words, of these two well-known characteristics of the Church? And what value do they have for Christian communities and for each one of us?

1. *Catholic* means universal. A complete and clear definition is offered by one of the Fathers of the Church of the first centuries, St Cyril of Jerusalem, when he affirmed: The Church is doubtless “called catholic, meaning universal, because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the truths which ought to come to men’s knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly”. (*The Catechesis* 18:23). A clear sign of the catholicity of the Church is that she speaks all languages, and this is the very effect of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-13): the Holy Spirit, in fact, enabled the Apostles and the whole Church to cause the Good News of God’s salvation and love to spread to all, even to the ends of the earth.

Thus, the Church was born catholic, that is, “symphonic” from her very origins, and can be only catholic, projected to evangelization and encounter with all. The Word of God can be read today in all languages; everyone has the Gospel in his or her own language in order to read it. And I return to this concept: it is always good to take a small Gospel with us, to carry it in a pocket, in a purse and read a passage during the day. This is good for us. The Gospel has been disseminated in all languages because the Church, the message of Jesus Christ the Redeemer, exists throughout the world. This is why the Church is *catholic*, because she is universal.

2. While the Church was born catholic, that is to say that she was born “outward-bound”, that she was born missionary. Had the Apostles remained in the Upper Room, without going out to disseminate the Gospel, the Church would be the Church of only that people, of that city, of that Upper Room. But they all went out into the world, from the moment of the Church’s birth, from the moment the Spirit descended upon them. And this is why the Church was born “outward-bound”, that is, missionary. This is what we express by deeming her *apostolic*, because an apostle is one who spreads the Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus. This term reminds us that the Church, on the foundation of the Apostles and in continuity with them — it was the Apostles who went and founded new churches, thus, they constituted new bishops throughout the world, and in continuity.

Today all of us are in continuity with that group of Apostles who received the Holy Spirit and then went “out”, to preach —, the Church is sent to take this Gospel message to all men, accompanying it with the signs of the tenderness and power of God. This too derives from the event of Pentecost: it is the Holy Spirit, indeed, who overcomes all resistance, to defeat the temptation of being self-absorbed, among the chosen few, thinking that God’s blessing is for them alone. If, for example, some Christians do this and say: “We are the chosen ones, we alone”, in the end, they die. They die first spiritually, then they die bodily, because they have no life, they are not capable of generating life, other people, other peoples: they are not apostolic. And it is precisely the Spirit who guides us to meet our brothers, even those who are most distant in every sense, in order that they may share with us the gift of love, peace, joy that the Risen Lord has bequeathed us.

3. What does it mean for our communities and for each one of us to belong to a Church which is catholic and apostolic? First of all, it means *taking the salvation of all mankind to heart*, not feeling indifferent or alien in facing the fate of so many of our brothers and sisters, but open and sympathetic toward them. It means, moreover, *having a sense of the fullness, the completeness, the harmony* of the Christian life, always rejecting partisan, unilateral positions, which close us within ourselves.

Belonging to the *apostolic* Church means being aware that our faith is anchored in the proclamation and the witness of the very Apostles of Jesus — it is anchored there, it is a long chain which comes from there —; and for this we always feel sent, we feel delegated, in communion with the Apostles' successors, to proclaim, with the heart filled with joy, Christ and his love, to all mankind. And here I would like to recall the heroic life of so very many missionaries, men and women who left their homeland in order to go to proclaim the Gospel in other countries, on other continents. A Brazilian Cardinal who works quite often in Amazonia, was telling me that when he goes to a place, to a village or a town in Amazonia, he always goes to the cemetery where he sees the tombs of these missionaries, priests, brothers, sisters who went to preach the Gospel: apostles. And he thinks: all of them could be canonized now, they left all in order to proclaim Jesus Christ. Let us give thanks to the Lord that our Church has so many missionaries, she has had so many missionaries, yet she needs even more! Let us thank the Lord for this. Perhaps among so many young people, teenagers who are here, someone has the will to become a missionary: go ahead! This is beautiful, to spread the Gospel of Jesus. Be brave young people!

Thus let us ask the Lord to renew in us the gift of his Spirit, that every Christian community and every baptized person may be the expression of the Holy Mother catholic and apostolic Church.

— CHAPTER VIII —

Charisms: Diversity and Unity

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 1st October 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

From the very beginning, the Lord has showered the Church with the gifts of his Spirit, thereby rendering her always vigorous and fruitful with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Among these gifts, some can be identified as especially precious for the edification of and for the journey of the Christian community: these are called *charisms*. In this catechesis we want to ask ourselves: what exactly is a charism? How can we recognize it and embrace it? And most of all: should the fact that there is a diversity and a multiplicity of charisms in the Church be seen in a positive sense, as a good thing, or as a problem?

In common parlance, when a “charism” is spoken of, it often means a talent, a natural ability. One says: “This person has a special charism to teach. It is a talent he or she has”. Thus, it is often said, regarding an especially bright and engaging person: “He or she is a charismatic person”. “What does this mean?”. “I don’t know, but he is charismatic”. And we say this. We don’t know what we are saying, but we say: “He is charismatic”. In the Christian perspective, however, a charism is much more than a personal

quality, a predisposition that one can be endowed with: a charism is *a grace, a gift bestowed by God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit*. And it is a gift which is given to someone not because he is better than others or because he deserves it: it is a gift that God gives him, because with his freely given love he can place him *in service to the entire community*, for the good of all. Speaking in a rather more human way, one says: “God gives this quality, this charism to this person, not for himself, but in order that he may put it at the service of the whole community”. Today before arriving in the Square, I received many disabled children in the Paul VI Hall. There were so many of them belonging to an association that is dedicated to caring for these children. What is it? This association, these people, these men and these women, have a charism to care for disabled children. This is a charism!

An important thing that should be highlighted immediately is the fact that *alone, one cannot understand whether one has a charism, and which one*. Many times we have heard someone say: “I have this quality, I can sing really well”. And no one has the courage to say: “It’s better to keep quiet, because you torture all of us when you sing!”. No one can say: “I have this charism”. It is within the community that the gifts the Father showers upon us bloom and flourish; and it is *in the bosom of the community* that one learns to recognize them as a sign of his love for all his children. So, each one of us should ask

him/herself: “Is there a charism that the Lord has endowed me with, by the grace of his Spirit, and that my brothers and sisters in the Christian community have recognized and encouraged? And how do I act with regard to this gift: do I use it with generosity, placing it at the service of everyone, or do I overlook it and end up forgetting about it? Or perhaps it becomes a reason for pride in me, such that I always complain about others and insist on getting my way in the community? These are questions that we must ask ourselves: if there is a charism in me, if this charism is recognized by the Church, if I am happy with this charism or am I a bit jealous of the charisms of others, whether I wanted or I want to have that charism. A charism is a gift: God alone bestows it!

The most beautiful experience, though, is the discovery of *all the different charisms* and all the gifts of his Spirit that the Father showers on his Church! This must not be seen as a reason for confusion, for discomfort: they are all gifts that God gives to the Christian community, in order that it may grow in harmony, in the faith and in his love, as one body, the Body of Christ. The same Spirit who bestows this diversity of charisms unites the Church. It is always the same Spirit. Before this multitude of charisms, our heart, therefore, must open itself to joy and we must think: “What a beautiful thing! So many different gifts, because we are all God’s children, all loved in a unique way”. Never must these gifts

become reasons for envy, or for division, for jealousy! As the Apostle Paul recalls in Chapter 12 of his First Letter to the Corinthians, all charisms are important in the eyes of God. At the same time, no one is irreplaceable. That is to say that within the Christian community, we need one another, and each gift received is fully realized when it is shared with one's brothers and sisters, for the good of all. This is the Church! And when the Church, in the variety of her charisms, is expressed in communion, she cannot be mistaken: it is the beauty and the power of the *sensus fidei*, of that supernatural sense of faith which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit in order that, together, we may all enter the heart of the Gospel and learn to follow Jesus in our life.

Today the Church is celebrating the Feast of St Teresa of the Child Jesus. This Saint, who died at the age of 24, loved the Church so much that she wanted to be a missionary, and said: "I would like to do this, this and this", she wanted all the charisms. She prayed, and she felt that her charism was love. And she said this beautiful phrase: "In the heart of the Church I will be love". And we all have this charism: the capacity to love. Today let us ask St Teresa of the Child Jesus for this capacity to love the Church so much, to love her so much, and to embrace all those charisms with this love of the children of the Church, of our Holy, Hierarchical Mother Church.

— CHAPTER IX —

Non-Catholic Christians

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 8 October 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

In recent catecheses, we have tried to highlight the nature and the beauty of the Church and we have asked ourselves what it means for each of us to belong to this people, the People of God, which is the Church. We must not forget, however, that there are so many brothers and sisters who share with us the faith in Christ, but who belong to other confessions or to traditions different from ours. Many have resigned themselves to this division — even within our Catholic Church many are resigned — which, in the course of history, has often been the cause of conflict and of suffering, also of war and this is a disgrace! Today too, relations are not always characterized by respect and courtesy.... But, I wonder: we, how do we feel about all this? Are we too, resigned, if not actually indifferent, to this division? Or do we firmly believe that one can and must walk in the direction of reconciliation and of full communion? Full communion, that is, for everyone to be able to partake together in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Divisions among Christians, while they wound the Church, wound Christ; and divided, we cause a wound to Christ: the Church is indeed the body

of which Christ is the Head. We know well how much Jesus had at heart that his disciples should remain united in his love. It suffices to consider his words, written in the 17th Chapter of the Gospel according to John, in Jesus' prayer to the Father when his passion was imminent: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn 17:11). This unity was already threatened while Jesus was still among them: in the Gospel, in fact, it is recorded that the Apostles argued among themselves about who was the greatest, the most important (cf. Lk 9:46). The Lord, however, emphatically insisted on unity in the name of the Father, allowing us to understand how much more credible our proclamation and our witness will be if we are first able to live in communion and to love each other. That is what his Apostles, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, would then deeply understand and take to heart, so much so that St Paul would reach the point of imploring the community of Corinth with these words: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).

During her journey in history, the Church has been tempted by the Evil One, who seeks to divide her, and unfortunately it has been marked by deep and painful schisms. They are divisions that at times, have been long and drawn out in time, up

until today, which is why it is now difficult to reconstruct all the motivations and especially to find possible solutions. The reasons which have led to the fractures and schisms may be the most diverse: from disagreement on dogmatic and moral principles and on theological concepts and pastoral differences, to political motives and convenience, to disputes caused by dislikes and personal ambition.... What is certain is that, in one way or another, arrogance and selfishness have always been behind these lacerations, rendering us intolerant, incapable of listening and accepting one with a vision or a position different from ours.

Now, faced by all of this, is there something that every one of us, as members of the Holy Mother Church, can and must do? Certainly, there must never be a shortage of prayer, in continuity and in communion with that of Jesus, prayer for the unity of Christians. And together with prayer, the Lord asks us for renewed openness: He asks us not to be closed to dialogue and to encounter, but to welcome all that is valid and positive which is offered even by someone who thinks differently from us or who takes a different stand. He asks us not to fix our gaze on what divides us, but rather on what unites us, seeking to know and love Jesus better and to share the richness of his love. And this means a concrete adherence to the Truth, together with the capacity for reciprocal forgiveness, to feel a part of the same Christian family, to consider oneself a gift for the other and

together to do many good things and works of charity.

It is grievous but there are divisions, there are many divided Christians, we have split amongst ourselves. But we all have something in common: we all believe in Jesus Christ, the Lord. We all believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and we all walk together, we are on the journey. Let us help one another! You think this way, you think that way.... In all communities there are good theologians: let them debate, let them seek theological truth because it is a duty, but let us walk together, praying for one another and doing works of charity. And like this, we are in communion on the journey. This is called spiritual ecumenism: to journey on the path of life, everyone together in our faith, in Jesus Christ the Lord. They say that one should not talk about personal things, but I cannot resist the temptation. We are speaking about communion... communion among us. And today, I am so thankful to the Lord because 70 years ago today, I made my First Communion. To make our First Communion we must know what it means to enter into communion with others, in communion with the brothers and sisters of our Church, but also in communion with those who belong to different communities but who believe in Jesus. Let us thank the Lord for our Baptism, let us thank the Lord for our communion, in order that this communion become joint communion with everyone, together.

Dear friends, let us therefore proceed toward full unity! History has separated us, but we are on the path toward reconciliation and communion! And this is true! And we must defend it! We are all on the path toward communion. And when the goal seems too distant, almost unreachable, and we feel gripped by despair, let us be comforted by the idea that God cannot close his ears to the voice of his Son Jesus or fail to grant his and our prayer: that all Christians may truly be one.

— CHAPTER X —

The Church as Bride Awaits Her Spouse

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 15 October 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

During this period we have spoken of the Church, of our Holy Mother hierarchical Church, the People of God on the journey. Today we would like to ask ourselves: at the end, what will happen to the People of God? What will happen to each of us? What should we expect? The Apostle Paul encouraged the Christians of the Thessalonian community, who were asking themselves these questions, and after his explanation they said these words, which are among the most beautiful of the New Testament: “And so we shall always be with the Lord”! (1 Thes 4:17). They are simple words, but laden with such great hope! “And so we shall always be with the Lord”. Do you believe this? ... It seems not. Do you believe? Shall we repeat it together? Three times?: “And so we shall always be with the Lord”. “And so we shall always be with the Lord”. “And so we shall always be with the Lord”. It is emblematic that John, taking up the intuition of the prophets in the Book of Revelation, describes the final, definitive dimension in terms of the “new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rv 21:2). That is what awaits us! This, then, is who the

Church is: she is the People of God who follows the Lord Jesus and who prepares herself day by day for the meeting with Him, as a bride with her bridegroom. And this is not just an expression: there will be actual nuptials! Yes, because Christ, by becoming a man like us and making us all one with him, with his death and his Resurrection, truly wedded us and constituted us, as a people, his bride. This is none other than the fulfilment of the plan of communion and of love woven by God throughout history, the history of the People of God and also the very history of each one of us. It is the Lord who is in the lead.

There is another aspect, however, which further comforts us and which opens the heart: John tells us that in the Church, the Bride of Christ, the “new Jerusalem” is made visible. This means that the Church, in addition to bride, is called to become a city, the symbol par excellence of human coexistence and relationality. How beautiful, then, already being able to contemplate, according to another very suggestive image in Revelation, all people and all peoples gathered together in this city, as in a tent, “the tent of God” (cf. Rv 21:3)! And in this glorious framework there will no longer be isolation, prevarication or distinctions of any kind — of a social, ethnic or religious nature — but we will all be one in Christ.

In sight of this wonderful and unprecedented scene, our heart cannot help feeling strongly confirmed in hope. You see, Christian hope is not

simply a desire, a wish, it is not optimism: for a Christian, hope is expectation, fervent expectation, impassioned by the ultimate and definitive fulfilment of a mystery, the mystery of God's love, in which we are born again and which are already experiencing. And it is the expectation of someone who is coming: it is Christ the Lord approaching ever closer to us, day by day, and who comes to bring us at last into the fullness of his communion and of his peace. The Church then, has the task of keeping the lamp of hope burning and clearly visible, so that it may continue to shine as a sure sign of salvation and illuminate for all humanity the path which leads to the encounter with the merciful face of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, here then is what we are awaiting: Jesus' return! The Church as bride awaits her Spouse! We must ask ourselves, however, with total sincerity: are we truly luminous and credible witnesses to this expectation, to this hope? Do our communities still live in the sign of the presence of the Lord Jesus and in the warm expectation of his coming, or do they appear tired, sluggish, weighed down by fatigue and resignation? Do we too run the risk of exhausting the oil of faith, and the oil of joy? Let us be careful!

Let us invoke the Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope and Queen of Heaven, that she may always keep us alert, listening and expectant, so that we may, already now, be permeated by Christ's love and

take part one day in the unending joy, in the full communion of God. Always remember, never forget: “And so we shall always be with the Lord”! (1 Thes 4:17). Shall we repeat it? Three more times? “And so we shall always be with the Lord!”. “And so we shall always be with the Lord!”. “And so we shall always be with the Lord!”.

— CHAPTER XI —

The Church is the Body of Christ

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 22 October 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

The image of the body is often used when one wishes to highlight how the elements that comprise a reality are strictly joined to one another together, forming one single thing. Starting with the Apostle Paul, this expression has been applied to the Church and has been acknowledged as her most profound and most beautiful distinguishing feature. Today, then, we would like to ask ourselves: in what sense does the Church form a body? And why is she defined as the “Body of Christ”?

In the Book of Ezekiel a vision is described, a bit particular, impressive, but capable of instilling trust and hope in our hearts. God shows the prophet an expanse of bones, separated from each other and dry. A desolate scene.... Imagine an entire valley full of bones. God asks him, then, to invoke the Spirit upon them. At that point, the bones move, they begin to come together, to join themselves. First nerves and then flesh grew on them and in this way they form a complete body, full of life (cf. Ez 37:1-14). See, this is the Church! Today, please take up the Bible at home. Open it at Chapter 37 of the Prophet Ezekiel, do

not forget, and read this, it is beautiful. This is the Church, she is a masterpiece, the masterpiece of the Spirit who instills in each one the new life of the Risen One and places us, beside one another, each at the service and support of the other, thereby making of all of us one single body, edified in communion and in love.

The Church, however, is not only a body built in the Spirit: the Church is the Body of Christ! And this is not simply a catchphrase: indeed, we truly are! It is the great gift that we receive on the day of our Baptism! In the sacrament of Baptism, indeed, Christ makes us his, welcoming us into the heart of the mystery of the Cross, the supreme mystery of his love for us, in order to cause us to then be raised with him, as new beings. See: in this way the Church is born, and in this way the Church is recognized as the Body of Christ! Baptism constitutes a true rebirth, which regenerates us in Christ, renders us a part of Him, and unites us intimately among ourselves, as limbs of the same body, of which He is the Head (cf. Rm 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-13).

What springs from it then, is a profound communion of love. In this sense, it is enlightening the way that Paul, exhorting the husbands to “love their wives as their own bodies”, states: “As Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:28-30). How beautiful it would be were we to remember more often what we are, what the Lord

Jesus made of us: we are his body: that body which nothing and no one can ever tear from Him and which He cloaks with all his passion and with all his love, just as a bridegroom does his bride. This thought, however, should cause to spring within us the desire to correspond to the Lord Jesus' love and share it among us, as living members of his own body. In the time of Paul, the community of Corinth found great difficulty in this sense, living, as we, too, often do, the experience of division, of envy, of misunderstanding and of exclusion. All of these things are not good because, instead of building up the Church and causing her to grow as the Body of Christ, they shatter it into many pieces, they dismember it. And this happens in our time as well. Let us consider, in Christian communities, in some parishes, let us think of how much division, how much envy, how they criticize, how much misunderstanding and exclusion there is in our neighbourhoods. And what does this lead to? It dismembers us among ourselves. It is the beginning of war. War does not begin on the battlefield: war, wars begin in the heart, with misunderstanding, division, envy, with this struggle with others. The community of Corinth was like this, they excelled in this!

The Apostle Paul gave some practical advice to the Corinthians, which also applies to us: do not be envious, but appreciate the talents and qualities of our brothers in our communities. Envy: "That one bought a car", and I feel so envious; "This one

won the lottery”, more envy; “And this other one is doing really well at this”, and more jealousy. All this dismembers, harms, do not do it! Because, in this way, envy grows and fills the heart. And a jealous heart is a sour heart, a heart which seems to have vinegar instead of blood; it is a heart that is never happy, it is a heart which dismembers the community. So what must I do then? Appreciate the talents and the qualities of our brothers and sisters in our communities. And when I feel envious — because envy comes to everyone, we are all sinners —, I must say to the Lord: “Thank you, Lord, because you have given this to that person”. Appreciate the qualities, be neighbours and share in the suffering of the least and the most needy; express your gratitude to everyone. The heart that knows how to say ‘thank you’ is a good heart, it is a noble heart, it is a heart that is content. Let me ask you: Do we all know how to say ‘thank you’, always? Not always, because envy, jealousy prevent us a little.

And lastly, the advice which the Apostle Paul gives the Corinthians and which we, too, must give one another: no one consider him/herself superior to the others. How many people feel superior to others! We, too, often say as did that Pharisee in the parable: “I thank you, Lord, that I am not like that one, I am superior”. But this is bad, it should never be done! And when you are about to do it, remember your sins, those that no one knows, feel shame before God and say: “You, Lord, you know who is superior, I’ll keep my

mouth shut”. And this is good. And always in charity consider ourselves each others’ limbs, that are alive, giving ourselves for the benefit of all (cf. 1 Cor 12:14).

Dear brothers and sisters, like the Prophet Ezekiel and like Paul the Apostle, let us, too, invoke the Holy Spirit, that his grace and the abundance of his gifts help us to truly live as the Body of Christ, united, as a family, but one family that is the Body of Christ, and as the visible sign of Christ’s love.

— CHAPTER XII —

**Relationship between the Visible
and Spiritual Nature of the Church**

*St. Peter's Square
Wednesday, 29 October 2014*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

In preceding catecheses we showed how the Church has a spiritual nature: it is the body of Christ, built up by the Holy Spirit. When we refer to the Church, however, the mind immediately turns to our communities, our parishes, our dioceses, to the structures where we usually gather and, obviously, to the more institutional components and the figures who administer, who govern her. This is the most visible reality of the Church. We must ask ourselves, then: are these two different things or the one single Church? And, if it is one single Church, how should we understand the relationship between the visible reality and the spiritual?

1. First of all, when we speak of the visible reality of the Church, we shouldn't just think of the Pope, Bishops, priests, sisters and all the consecrated people. The visible reality of the Church is made up of the many baptized brothers and sisters in the world who believe, hope and love. But many times we hear: "But, the Church doesn't do this, The Church does not do something else..." — "But, tell me, who is the Church?" — "They are

the priests, the bishops, the Pope...” — the Church is us all, us! All baptized persons are the Church, Jesus’ Church. Made up of: all those who follow the Lord Jesus and who, in his name, come close to the least and the suffering, seeking to offer a little relief, comfort and peace: all those who do what the Lord commanded of us are the Church. We understand also, then, that the visible reality of the Church is not measurable, she cannot be known in her fullness: how can we know all the good that is done? So many works of love, so much fidelity in families, so much effort to educate children, to transmit the faith, so much suffering among the sick who offer their suffering up to the Lord.... But this cannot be measured and it is so very great! How can we know all the marvels that, through us, Christ manages to work in the heart and life of every person? You see: even the visible reality of the Church is beyond our control, beyond our power, and it is a mysterious reality because it comes from God.

2. In order to comprehend the relationship, in the Church, the relation between her visible reality and the spiritual realm, there is no other way than to look to Christ, whose body is constituted by the Church and who generates her, in an act of infinite love. Also in Christ, indeed, by the power of the mystery of the Incarnation, we recognize a human nature and a divine nature, united in the same person in a miraculous and indissoluble way. This holds in an analogous way for the Church. How, as in Christ, the Church’s human nature fully

seconds the Divine nature, by placing herself at his service, in order to bring salvation to completion. And the Church, therefore, is a mystery, in which what is not seen is more important than what is seen, and can be recognized only with the eyes of faith (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).

3. In the case of the Church, however, we must ask ourselves: how can the visible reality be at the service of the spiritual reality? Once again, we can understand it by looking at Christ. Christ is the model for the Church, because the Church is his body. He is the model for all Christians, for us all. When one looks to Christ, one does not err. The Gospel of Luke recounts how Jesus, having returned to Nazareth, where he grew up, entered the synagogue and read, making reference to himself, the passage from the Prophet Isaiah where it is written: “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’s favour” (4:18-19). Behold how Christ used his humanity — for was also a man — to proclaim and fulfil the divine plan of redemption and salvation — because he was God; so too must it be for the Church. Through her visible reality, all that can be seen, the sacraments and witness of all us Christians, the Church is called every day to be

close to every man, to begin with the one who is poor, the one who suffers and the one who is marginalized, in such a way as to make all people feel the compassionate and merciful gaze of Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, often as Church we experience our own weakness and our limits. We all have them. We are all sinners. None of us can say: “I’m not a sinner”. If someone among us feels that he is not a sinner, raise your hand. We all are. And this weakness, these limitations, these sins of ours... it is right that they stir great sorrow in us, especially when we set a bad example and we notice we have to become a source of scandal. How many times have we heard in the neighbourhood: “That person there is always going to Church but he/she slanders everyone...”. This is not Christian, it is a bad example: it is a sin. And this is how we set a bad example: “and, in short, if this or that person is a Christian, then I shall become an atheist”. Our witness is to make others understand what it means to be Christian. Let us ask not be a source of scandal. Let us ask for the gift of faith, so that we can understand how, despite our smallness and our poverty, the Lord has made us a true vehicle of grace and a visible sign of his love for all humanity. We can become a cause of scandal, yes. But we can also become a cause of witness, by saying with our life what Jesus wants of us.

— CHAPTER XIII —

Holy Mother Church as Hierarchy

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 5 November 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

We have listened to what the Apostle Paul says to Bishop Tito. How many virtues do we bishops have? We heard everything, did we not? It's not easy, it's not easy, because we are sinners. But we entrust ourselves to your prayers, so that we may at least come closer to these things that the Apostle Paul advises all bishops. Do you agree? Will you pray for us?

We have already had the occasion to stress, in preceding catecheses, how the Holy Spirit is always abundantly filling the Church with his gifts. Now, by the power and grace of His Spirit, Christ does not fail to set up ministries in order to build up Christian communities as his Body. Among these ministries, one can distinguish that of the episcopate. In the bishop, assisted by priests and deacons, it is Christ himself who makes himself present and who continues to care for his Church, by ensuring his protection and his guidance.

1. In the presence and in the ministry of the bishops, of the priests and deacons, we can recognize the true face of the Church: it is the

Hierarchical Holy Mother Church. And truly, through these brothers chosen by the Lord and consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Church exercises her motherhood: she gives birth to us in Baptism as Christians, giving us a new birth in Christ; she watches over our growth in the faith; she accompanies us into the arms of the Father, to receive his forgiveness; she prepares the Eucharistic table for us, where she nourishes us with the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus; she invokes upon us the blessing of God and the power of his Spirit, sustaining us throughout the course of our life and enveloping us with her tenderness and warmth, especially in those most delicate moments of trial, of suffering and of death.

2. This motherhood of the Church is expressed in particular in the person of the bishop and in his ministry. In fact, as Jesus chose the Apostles and sent them out to proclaim the Gospel and to tend his flock, so bishops, his successors, are set at the head of Christian communities, as guarantors of the faith and as living signs of the presence of the Lord among them. We understand, then, that this is not a position of prestige, an honorary title. The episcopate is not an honour, it's a service. This is how Jesus wanted it. There should be no place in the Church for a worldly mentality. The worldly mentality says: "This man took the ecclesiastical career path, he became a bishop". No, no, in the Church there must be no place for this mindset. The episcopate is a service, not an honour to boast

about. Being a bishop means keeping before one's eyes the example of Jesus who, as the Good Shepherd, came not to be served, but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45) and to give his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:11). Holy bishops — and there are many in the history of the Church, many holy bishops — show us that this ministry is not sought, is not requested, is not bought, but is accepted in obedience, not in order to elevate oneself, but to lower oneself, as Jesus did who “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). It is sad when one sees a man who seeks this office and who does so much just to get there; and when he gets there, he does not serve, he struts around, he lives only for his own vanity.

3. There is another precious element that deserves to be pointed out. When Jesus chose and called the Apostles, He did not think of them as separate from one another, each one on his own, but together, because they were to stay with Him, united, like a single family. Furthermore, bishops also constitute one single College, gathered around the Pope, who is the guardian and guarantor of this profound communion that was so close to Jesus' heart and to his Apostles' too. How beautiful it is, then, when bishops, with the Pope, express this collegiality and always seek to be better servants to the faithful, better servants in the Church! We recently experienced it in the Assembly of the Synod on the Family. Just think of all the bishops spread around the world who,

despite living in widely different places, cultures, sensibilities and traditions — one bishop said to me the other day that it takes him more than 30 hours by plane to come to Rome — they each feel part of the other and they become an expression of the intimate bond, in Christ, between their communities. And in the common prayer of the Church, all bishops place themselves together in listening to the Lord and to the Holy Spirit, paying profound attention to man and to the signs of the times (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4).

Dear friends, all this makes us understand that Christian communities recognize in the bishop a great gift, and are called to nourish a sincere and profound communion with him, beginning with the priests and deacons. No Church is healthy if the faithful, the deacons and the priests are not united to the bishop. This Church, that is not united to the bishop, is a sick Church. Jesus wanted this union of all the faithful with the bishop, including the deacons and priests. And this they do aware that it is precisely in the bishop that the bond is made visible with each Church, with the Apostles and with all other communities, united to their bishops and the Pope in the one Church of the Lord Jesus, that is our Hierarchical Holy Mother Church. Thank you.

— CHAPTER XIV —

**The Characteristics of the Ministers
of the Church**

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 12 November 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

In the preceding catechesis on the Church, we pointed out how the Lord continues to shepherd his flock through the ministry of bishops, assisted by priests and deacons. It is in them that Jesus makes himself present, in the power of his Spirit, and continues to serve the Church, nourishing within her faith, hope and the witness of love. These ministers are thus a great gift of the Lord for every Christian community and for the whole of the Church, as they are a living sign of the presence of his love.

Today we want to ask ourselves: what is asked of these ministers of the Church, in order that they may live out their service in a genuine and fruitful way.

1. In the “Pastoral Letters” sent to his disciples, Timothy and Titus, the Apostle Paul carefully pauses on the figures of bishop, priest and deacon, also on the figures of the faithful, the elderly and young people. He pauses on a description of each state of a Christian in the Church, delineating for bishops, priests and deacons what they are called to and what prerogatives must be acknowledged in those chosen and invested with these ministries.

Today it is emblematic that, along with the gifts inherent in the faith and in spiritual life — which cannot be overlooked, for they are life itself — some exquisitely human qualities are listed: acceptance, temperance, patience, meekness, trustworthiness, goodness of heart. This is the alphabet, the basic grammar, of every ministry! It must be the basic grammar of every bishop, priest and deacon. Yes, this beautiful and genuine predisposition is necessary to meet, understand, dialogue with, appreciate and relate to brothers in a respectful and sincere way — without this predisposition it is not possible to offer truly joyous and credible service and testimony.

2. There is also a basic conduct which Paul recommends to his disciples and, as a result, to all those who are called to pastoral ministry, be they bishops, priests, presbyters or deacons. The Apostle says that the gift which has been received must be continually rekindled (cf. 1 Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6). This means that there must always be a profound awareness that one is not bishop, priest or deacon because he is more intelligent, worthier or better than other men; he is such only pursuant to a gift, a gift of love bestowed by God, through the power of his Spirit, for the good of his people. This awareness is very important and constitutes a grace to ask for every day! Indeed, a Pastor who is cognizant that his ministry springs only from the heart of God can never assume an authoritarian attitude, as if everyone were at his feet and the community were his property, his personal kingdom.

3. The awareness that everything is a gift, everything is grace, also helps a Pastor not to fall into the temptation of placing himself at the centre of attention and trusting only in himself. They are the temptations of vanity, pride, sufficiency, arrogance. There would be problems if a bishop, a priest or a deacon thought he knew everything, that he always had the right answer for everything and did not need anyone. On the contrary, awareness that he, as the first recipient of the mercy and compassion of God, should lead a minister of the Church to always be humble and sympathetic with respect to others. Also, in the awareness of being called to bravely guard the faith entrusted (cf. 1 Tm 6:20), he shall listen to the people. He is in fact cognizant of always having something to learn, even from those who may still be far from the faith and from the Church. With his confreres, then, all this must lead to taking on a new attitude marked by sharing, joint responsibility and communion.

Dear friends, we must always be grateful to the Lord, for in the person and in the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, he continues to guide and shape his Church, making her grow along the path of holiness. At the same time, we must continue to pray, that the Pastors of our communities can be living images of the communion and of the love of God.

— CHAPTER XV —

Universal Vocation to Holiness

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 19 November 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

One of the great gifts from the Second Vatican Council was that of recovering a vision of the Church founded on communion, and grasping anew the principle of authority and hierarchy in this perspective. This has helped us to better understand that all Christians, insofar as they have been baptized, are equal in dignity before the Lord and share in the same vocation, that is, to sainthood (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 39-42). Now let us ask ourselves: what does this universal vocation to being saints consist in? And how can we realize it?

1. First of all, we must bear clearly in mind that sanctity is not something we can procure for ourselves, that we can obtain by our own qualities and abilities. Sanctity is a gift, it is a gift granted to us by the Lord Jesus, when He takes us to Himself and clothes us in Himself, He makes us like Him. In his Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul states that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (5:25-26). You see, sainthood truly is the most beautiful face of the Church, the most beautiful face: it is to rediscover oneself in

communion with God, in the fullness of his life and of his love. Sanctity is understood, then, not as a prerogative of the few: sanctity is a gift offered to all, no one excluded, by which the distinctive character of every Christian is constituted.

2. All this makes us understand that, in order to be saints, there is no need to be bishops, priests or religious: no, we are all called to be saints! So, many times we are tempted to think that sainthood is reserved only to those who have the opportunity to break away from daily affairs in order to dedicate themselves exclusively to prayer. But it is not so! Some think that sanctity is to close your eyes and to look like a holy icon. No! This is not sanctity! Sanctity is something greater, deeper, which God gives us. Indeed, it is precisely in living with love and offering one's own Christian witness in everyday affairs that we are called to become saints. And each in the conditions and the state of life in which he or she finds him- or herself. But you are consecrated. Are you consecrated? — Be a saint by living out your donation and your ministry with joy. Are you married? — Be a saint by loving and taking care of your husband or your wife, as Christ did for the Church. Are you an unmarried baptized person? — Be a saint by carrying out your work with honesty and competence and by offering time in the service of your brothers and sisters. "But, father, I work in a factory; I work as an accountant, only with numbers; you can't be a

saint there...”. “Yes, yes you can! There, where you work, you can become a saint. God gives you the grace to become holy. God communicates himself to you”. Always, in every place, one can become a saint, that is, one can open oneself up to this grace, which works inside us and leads us to holiness. Are you a parent or a grandparent? — Be a saint by passionately teaching your children or grandchildren to know and to follow Jesus. And it takes so much patience to do this: to be a good parent, a good grandfather, a good mother, a good grandmother; it takes so much patience and with this patience comes holiness: by exercising patience. Are you a catechist, an educator or a volunteer? Be a saint by becoming a visible sign of God’s love and of his presence alongside us. This is it: every state of life leads to holiness, always! In your home, on the street, at work, at church, in that moment and in your state of life, the path to sainthood has been opened. Don’t be discouraged to pursue this path. It is God alone who gives us the grace. The Lord asks only this: that we be in communion with Him and at the service of our brothers and sisters.

3. At this point, each one of us can make a little examination of conscience, we can do it right now, each one respond to himself, in silence: how have we responded up to now to the Lord’s call to sanctity? Do I want to become a little better, a little more Christian? This is the path to holiness. When the Lord invites us to become saints, he doesn’t call us to something heavy, sad... quite the

contrary! It's an invitation to share in his joy, to live and to offer with joy every moment of our life, by making it become at the same time a gift of love for the people around us. If we understand this, everything changes and takes on new meaning, a beautiful meaning, a meaning that begins with little everyday things. For example: a lady goes to the market to buy groceries and finds a neighbour there, so they begin to talk and then they come to gossiping and this lady says: "No, no, no I won't speak badly about anyone". This is a step towards sainthood, it helps you become more holy. Then, at home, your son wants to talk a little about his ideas: "Oh, I am so tired, I worked so hard today...". — "But you sit down and listen to your son, who needs it!". And you sit down, you listen to him patiently: this is a step towards sainthood. Then the day ends, we are all tired, but there are the prayers. We say our prayers: this too is a step towards holiness. Then comes Sunday and we go to Mass, we take communion, sometimes preceded by a beautiful confession which cleans us a little. This is a step towards sainthood. Then we think of Our Lady, so good, so beautiful, and we take up the rosary and we pray it. This is a step towards sainthood. Then I go out to the street, I see a poor person in need, I stop and address him, I give him something: it is a step towards sainthood. These are little things, but many little steps to sanctity. Every step towards sainthood makes us better people, free from selfishness and being closed within

ourselves, and opens us to our brothers and sisters and to their needs.

Dear friends, in the First Letter of St Peter this is asked of us: “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (4:10-11). This is the invitation to holiness! Let us accept it with joy, and let us support one another, for the path to sainthood is not taken alone, each one for oneself, but is traveled together, in that one body that is the Church, loved and made holy by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us go forward with courage on this path to holiness.

— CHAPTER XVI —

Pilgrimage to the Kingdom

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 26 November 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

Today's weather is a bit unpleasant but you are all brave, my compliments! Let's hope to be able to pray together today.

In presenting the Church to the men and women of our time, the Second Vatican Council kept well in mind a fundamental truth, one we should never forget: the Church is not a static reality, inert, an end in herself, but is on a continual journey through history, towards that ultimate and marvelous end that is the Kingdom of Heaven, of which the Church on earth is the seed and the beginning (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5). When we turn to this horizon, we discover that our imagination falls short, hardly able to intuit the splendour of a mystery which surpasses our senses. And several questions spontaneously rise up in us: when will that final step happen? What will the new dimension which the Church enters be like? What will become of humanity then? And of Creation around us? But these questions are not new, the disciples had already asked Jesus about them at that time: "When will this come to pass? When will the Spirit triumph over creation, over

creatures, over everything...”. These are human questions, time-old questions. And we too are asking these questions.

1. The Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, faced with these questions that forever resonate in the hearts of men and women, states: “We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart” (n. 39). This is the Church’s destination: it is, as the Bible says, the “new Jerusalem”, “Paradise”. More than a place, it is a “state” of soul in which our deepest hopes are fulfilled in superabundance and our being, as creatures and as children of God, reach their full maturity. We will finally be clothed in the joy, peace and love of God, completely, without any limit, and we will come face to face with Him! (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). It is beautiful to think of this, to think of Heaven. We will all be there together. It is beautiful, it gives strength to the soul.

2. In this perspective, it is good to grasp the kind of continuity and deep communion there is between the Church in Heaven and that which is still a pilgrim on earth. Those who already live in the sight of God can indeed sustain us and

intercede for us, pray for us. On the other hand, we too are always invited to offer up good works, prayer and the Eucharist itself in order to alleviate the tribulation of souls still awaiting never-ending beatitude. Yes, because in the Christian perspective the distinction is not between who is dead and who is not, but between who is in Christ and who is not! This is the point of determination, what is truly decisive for our salvation and for our happiness.

3. At the same time, Sacred Scripture teaches us that the fulfillment of this marvellous plan cannot but involve everything that surrounds us and came from the heart and mind of God. The Apostle Paul says it explicitly, when he says that “Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Other texts utilize the image of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (cf. 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1), in the sense that the whole universe will be renewed and will be freed once and for all from every trace of evil and from death itself. What lies ahead is the fulfillment of a transformation that in reality is already happening, beginning with the death and resurrection of Christ. Hence, it is the new creation; it is not, therefore, the annihilation of the cosmos and of everything around us, but the bringing of all things into the fullness of being, of truth and of beauty. This is the design that God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, willed from eternity to realize and is realizing.

Dear friends, when we think of this magnificent reality awaiting us, we become aware of how marvellous a gift it is to belong to the Church which bears in writing the highest of vocations! So, let us ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to keep constant watch over our journey and to help us to be, as she is, a joyful sign of trust and of hope among our brothers and sisters.