



VIGIL OF PENTECOST WITH THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS



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ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

SAINT PETER'S SQUARE
SATURDAY, 18 MAY 2013

VIDEO

Good evening to you all!

I am happy to meet you and glad that we are all gathered in Saint Peter's Square to pray, to be united and to await the gift of the Spirit. I had already looked at your questions and I have thought about them — so my words to you tonight are offered with prior knowledge! We must always begin with the truth! I have them in front of me, written down.

Here is the first question, "How have you been able in your life to attain the certainty of faith; and what route do you suggest we take to enable each one of us to overcome the fragility of our faith?" This is a historical question, because it concerns my personal history, my life-story!

I had the great blessing of growing up in a family in which faith was lived in a simple, practical way. However it was my paternal grandmother in particular who influenced my journey of faith. She was a woman who explained to us, who talked to us about Jesus, who taught us the Catechism. I always remember that on the evening of Good Friday she

would take us to the candle-light procession, and at the end of this procession “the dead Christ” would arrive and our grandmother would make us — the children — kneel down and she would say to us: “Look, he is dead, but tomorrow he will rise”. This was how I received my first Christian proclamation, from this very woman, from my grandmother! This is really beautiful! The first proclamation at home, in the family! And this makes me think of the love of so many mothers and grandmothers in the transmission of faith. They are the ones who pass on the faith. This used to happen in the early Church too, for Saint Paul said to Timothy: “I am reminded of the faith of your mother and of your grandmother” (cf. 2 Tim 1:5). All the mothers and all the grandmothers who are here should think about this: passing on the faith! Because God sets beside us people who help us on our journey of faith. We do not find our faith in the abstract, no! It is always a person preaching who tells us who Jesus is, who communicates faith to us and gives us the first proclamation. And this is how I received my first experience of faith.

One day in particular, though, was very important to me: 21 September 1953. I was almost 17. It was “Students’ Day”, for us the first day of spring — for you the first day of autumn. Before going to the celebration I passed through the parish I normally attended, I found a priest that I did not know and I felt the need to go to confession. For me this was an experience of encounter: I found that someone was waiting for me. Yet I do not know what happened, I can’t remember, I do not know why that particular priest was there whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess, but the truth is that someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice, or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest.

This experience of faith is important. We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first! In Spanish we have a word that explains this well: *primerear* — the Lord always gets there before us, he gets there first, he is waiting for us! To find someone waiting for you is truly a great grace. You go to him as a sinner, but he is waiting to forgive you. This is the experience that the Prophets of Israel describe, comparing the Lord to almond blossom, the first flower of spring (cf. Jer 1:11-12). Before any other flowers appear, he is there, waiting. The Lord is waiting for us. Moreover, when we seek him, we discover that he is waiting to welcome us, to offer us his love. And this fills your heart with such wonder that you can hardly believe it, and this is how your faith grows — through encounter with a Person, through encounter with the Lord. Some people will say, “No, I prefer to read about faith in books!” It is important to read about faith, but look, on its own this is not enough! What is important is our encounter with Jesus, our encounter with him, and this is what gives you faith because he is the one who gives it to you!

You were also talking about the fragility of faith, about how to overcome it. The worst enemy of a fragile faith — curious, isn’t it? — is fear. Do not be afraid! We are frail and we know it, but he is stronger! If you walk with him there is no problem! A child is very frail — I have seen many children today — but if they’re with their father, with their mother, they are safe. With the Lord we are safe. Faith grows with the Lord, from the very hand of the Lord; this helps us grow and makes us strong. However if we think we can manage on our own.... Just think what happened to Peter: “Lord I will never fall away!” (cf. Mt 26:33-35); and then the cock crowed, and Peter had denied the Lord three times! (cf. vv. 69-75).

Think about it: when we are too self-confident, we are more fragile — much more fragile. Always with the Lord, with the Lord! And when we say “with the Lord”, we mean with the Eucharist, with the Bible, with prayer... but also with the family, with our mother, also with her, because she is the one who brings us to the Lord; she is the mother, she is the one who knows everything. So pray to Our Lady too and ask her, as a mother, to “make me strong”. This is what I think about fragility, at least it has been my experience. One thing that makes me strong every day is praying the Rosary to Our Lady. I feel such great strength because I go to her and I feel strong.

Let us move on to the second question.

“I think that all of us here are keenly aware of the challenge of evangelization that is at the heart of our experience. This, Holy Father, is why I want to ask you to help me and help all of us to understand how to live this challenge at the present time. What do you consider the most important target on which all of us movements, associations and communities must set our sights if we are to be able to carry out the task to which we are called? How can we communicate faith effectively today?”

I shall answer with just three words. The first: *Jesus*. What is the most important thing? Jesus. If we forge ahead with our own arrangements, with other things, with beautiful things but without Jesus we make no headway, it does not work. Jesus is more important. I would like now to make a small complaint, but in a brotherly way, just between ourselves. All of you in the square shouted “Francis, Francis, Pope Francis”; but where was Jesus? I should have preferred to hear you cry: “Jesus, Jesus is Lord, and he is in our midst!” From now on enough of “Francis”, just “Jesus”!

The second word is: *prayer*. Looking at the face of God, but above all — and this has to do with what I said earlier — realizing that he is also looking at us. The Lord looks at us. He looks at us first. My experience is what I feel in front of the tabernacle, when I go in the evening to pray before the Lord. Sometimes I nod off for a while; this is true, for the strain of the day more or less makes you fall asleep, but he understands. I feel great comfort when I think of the Lord looking at me. We think we have to pray and talk, talk, talk.... No! Let the Lord look at you. When he looks at us, he gives us strength and helps us to bear witness to him — for the question was about witnessing to faith, wasn’t it?

First “*Jesus*”, then “*prayer*” — let us think of God holding us by the hand. Then I would like to draw attention to this element: letting ourselves be led by him. This is more important than any calculation. We are true evangelizers when we let him guide us. Think of Peter; perhaps he was having a snooze when he had a vision, the vision of the sheet with all the animals, and he heard Jesus telling him something that he did not understand. At that moment some non-Jews came to call him to go to a certain house and he saw that the Holy Spirit was there.

Peter let Jesus guide him to that first evangelization of the Gentiles, who were not Jews, something inconceivable at the time (cf. Acts 10:9-33). So it has been, throughout history, throughout history! Letting ourselves be led by Jesus. He is our leader, our leader is Jesus.

And the third word: *witness*. Jesus, prayer – prayer, letting ourselves be led by him – and then witness. But I would like to add something. Letting oneself be led by Jesus leads to the surprises of Jesus. We might think we should work out programmes of evangelization carefully, thinking of strategies and making plans, but these are only tools, small tools. What matters is Jesus and letting ourselves be led by him. We can then plot our strategies but this is secondary.

Finally, witness: faith can only be communicated through witness, and that means love. Not with our own ideas but with the Gospel, lived out in our own lives and brought to life within us by the Holy Spirit. There is, as it were, a synergy between us and the Holy Spirit, and this leads to witness. The Church is carried forward by the Saints, who are the very ones who bear this witness. As both John Paul ii and Benedict xvi have said, today’s world stands in great need of witnesses, not so much of teachers but rather of witnesses. It’s not so much about speaking, but rather speaking with our whole lives: living consistently, the very consistency of our lives! This consistency means living Christianity as an encounter with Jesus that brings me to others, not just as a social label. In terms of society, this is how we are, we are Christians closed in on ourselves. No, not this! Witness is what counts!

The third question: “Holy Father, I would like to ask you how I, how we can live as a poor Church and for the poor. How does a suffering person pose a question for our faith? What practical, effective contribution can all of us, as members of lay movements and

associations, make to the Church and to society in order to address this grave crisis that is affecting public ethics” — this is important! — “the model of development, politics, that is to say, a new way of being men and women?”

I shall return to the idea of “witness”. First of all living out the Gospel is the main contribution we can make. The Church is neither a political movement nor a well-organized structure. That is not what she is. We are not an NGO, and when the Church becomes an NGO she loses her salt, she has no savour, she is only an empty organization.

We need cunning here, because the devil deceives us and we risk falling into the trap of hyper-efficiency. Preaching Jesus is one thing; attaining goals, being efficient is another. No, efficiency is a different value. Basically the value of the Church is living by the Gospel and witnessing to our faith. The Church is the salt of the earth, she is the light of the world. She is called to make present in society the leaven of the Kingdom of God and she does this primarily with her witness, the witness of brotherly love, of solidarity and of sharing with others. When you hear people saying that solidarity is not a value but a “primary attitude” to be got rid of... this will not do! They are thinking of an efficiency that is purely worldly.

Times of crisis, like the one we are living through — you said earlier that “we live in a world of lies” — this time of crisis, beware, is not merely an economic crisis. It is not a crisis of culture. It is a human crisis: it is the human person that is in crisis! Man himself is in danger of being destroyed! But man is the image of God! This is why it is a profound crisis!

At this time of crisis we cannot be concerned solely with ourselves, withdrawing into loneliness, discouragement and a sense of powerlessness in the face of problems. Please do not withdraw into yourselves! This is a danger: we shut ourselves up in the parish, with our friends, within the movement, with the like-minded... but do you know what happens? When the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! That is a danger. Nevertheless we lock ourselves up in our parish, among our friends, in our movement, with people who think as we do... but do you know what happens? When the Church is closed, she falls sick, she falls sick. Think of a room that has been closed for a year. When you go into it there is a smell of damp, many things are wrong with it. A Church closed in on herself is the same, a sick Church.

The Church must step outside herself. To go where? To the outskirts of existence, whatever they may be, but she must step out. Jesus tells us: “Go into all the world! Go! Preach! Bear witness to the Gospel!” (cf. Mk 16:15). But what happens if we step outside ourselves? The same as can happen to anyone who comes out of the house and onto the street: an accident. But I tell you, I far prefer a Church that has had a few accidents to a Church that has fallen sick from being closed.

Go out, go out! Think of what the Book of Revelation says as well. It says something beautiful: that Jesus stands at the door and knocks, knocks to be let into our heart (cf. Rev 3:20). This is the meaning of the Book of Revelation. But ask yourselves this question: how often is Jesus inside and knocking at the door to be let out, to come out? And we do not let him out because of our own need for security, because so often we are locked into ephemeral structures that serve solely to make us slaves and not free children of God.

In this “stepping out” it is important to be ready for encounter. For me this word is very important. Encounter with others. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others. We live in a culture of conflict, a culture of fragmentation, a culture in which I throw away what is of no use to me, a culture of waste.

Yet on this point, I ask you to think — and it is part of the crisis — of the elderly, who are the wisdom of a people, think of the children... the culture of waste! However, we must go out to meet them, and with our faith we must create a “culture of encounter”, a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak

with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith.

They all have something in common with us: they are images of God, they are children of God. Going out to meet everyone, without losing sight of our own position. There is another important point: encountering the poor. If we step outside ourselves we find poverty. Today — it sickens the heart to say so — the discovery of a tramp who has died of the cold is not news. Today what counts as news is, maybe, a scandal. A scandal: ah, that is news! Today, the thought that a great many children do not have food to eat is not news. This is serious, this is serious! We cannot put up with this! Yet that is how things are. We cannot become starched Christians, those over-educated Christians who speak of theological matters as they calmly sip their tea. No! We must become courageous Christians and go in search of the people who are the very flesh of Christ, those who are the flesh of Christ!

When I go to hear confessions — I still can't, because to go out to hear confessions... from here it's impossible to go out, but that's another problem — when I used to go to hear confessions in my previous diocese, people would come to me and I would always ask them: "Do you give alms?" — "Yes, Father!" "Very good." And I would ask them two further questions: "Tell me, when you give alms, do you look the person in the eye?" "Oh I don't know, I haven't really thought about it". The second question: "And when you give alms, do you touch the hand of the person you are giving them to or do you toss the coin at him or her?" This is the problem: the flesh of Christ, touching the flesh of Christ, taking upon ourselves this suffering for the poor. Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us.

This is our poverty: the poverty of the flesh of Christ, the poverty that brought the Son of God to us through his Incarnation. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy.

However there is one problem that can afflict Christians: the spirit of the world, the worldly spirit, spiritual worldliness. This leads to self-sufficiency, to living by the spirit of the world rather than by the spirit of Jesus. You asked the question: how should we live in order to address this crisis that affects public ethics, the model of development and politics? Since this is a crisis of man, a crisis that destroys man, it is a crisis that strips man of ethics. In public life, in politics, if there is no ethics, an ethics of reference, everything is possible and everything can be done. We see, moreover, whenever we read the newspapers, that the lack of ethics in public life does great harm to the whole of humanity.

I would like to tell you a story. I have already told it twice this week, but I will tell it a third time to you. It is taken from a biblical *midrash* by a 12th-century rabbi. He tells the tale of the building of the Tower of Babel and he says that, in order to build the Tower of Babel, bricks had to be made. What does this mean? Going out and mixing the mud, fetching straw, doing everything... then the kiln. And when the brick was made it had to be hoisted, for the construction of the Tower of Babel. Every brick was a treasure because of all the work required to make it. Whenever a brick fell, it was a national tragedy and the guilty workman was punished; a brick was so precious that if it fell there was a great drama. Yet if a workman fell, nothing happened, that was something else. This happens today: if the investments in the banks fall slightly... a tragedy... what can be done? But if people die of hunger, if they have nothing to eat, if they have poor health, it does not matter! This is our crisis today! And the witness of a poor Church for the poor goes against this mentality.

The fourth question: "in the face of such situations, I think my confession of faith, my witness, is timid and awkward. I would like to do more, but what? And how can I help these brethren of ours, how can I alleviate their suffering since I can do nothing or only very little to change their political and social context?".

To proclaim the Gospel two virtues are essential: courage and patience [acceptance of suffering]. They [Christians who are suffering] are in the Church of “patience”. They suffer and there are more martyrs today than there were in the early centuries of the Church. More martyrs! Our own brothers and sisters. They are suffering! They carry their faith even to martyrdom. However martyrdom is never a defeat; martyrdom is the highest degree of the witness we must give. We are on the way to martyrdom, as small martyrs: giving up this, doing that... but we are on the way. And they, poor things, they give their lives, but they do so — as we heard in the situation in Pakistan — for love of Jesus, witnessing to Jesus.

Christians must always have this attitude of meekness, humility, the same attitude that they have, trusting in Jesus and entrusting themselves to Jesus. It should be made clear that very often these conflicts do not have a religious origin; there are frequently other social and political causes, and unfortunately religious affiliation is used like fuel to add to the fire. A Christian must always know how to respond to evil with good, even though it is often difficult.

We try to make these brothers and sisters of ours aware of how deeply united — deeply united! — we are with their situation, how conscious we are that they are Christians who have entered into “patience”. When Jesus goes to his Passion, he enters into “patience”. They have done the same: we should tell them so, but we should also tell the Lord.

I put a question to you: do you pray for these brothers and sisters? Do you pray for them? In your daily prayers? I am not going to ask those who do to raise their hands: no. I am not going to ask that now. But think about it carefully. In our daily prayers let us say to Jesus: “Lord, look at this brother, look at this sister who is suffering so much, suffering atrociously!” They experience the limit, the very limit between life and death. And there are consequences for us: this experience must spur us to promote religious freedom for everyone, everyone! Every man and every woman must be free in his or her profession of religion, whatever it may be. Why? Because that man and that woman are children of God.

And so I think I have made some response to your questions; excuse me if I have gone on for too long. Thank you very much! Thank you, and do not forget: there must be no question of a closed Church, but rather a Church which is ready to step outside, to go to the outlying regions. May the Lord guide us here on earth. Many thanks.