



DAY OF CONFRATERNITIES AND OF POPULAR PIETY



HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE DAY OF CONFRATERNITIES

AND OF POPULAR PIETY
HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS
Saint Peter's Square

Sixth Sunday of Easter, 5 May 2013

Video

Photo Gallery

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is brave of you to come here in this rain ... May the Lord bless you abundantly!

As part of the journey of the *Year of Faith*, I am happy to celebrate this Eucharist dedicated in a special way to confraternities: a traditional reality in the Church, which in recent times has experienced renewal and rediscovery. I greet all of you with affection, particularly the confraternities which have come here from all over the world! Thank you for your presence and your witness!

1. In the Gospel we heard a passage from the farewell discourses of Jesus, as related by the evangelist John in the context of the Last Supper. Jesus entrusts his last thoughts, as a spiritual testament, to the apostles before he leaves them. Today's text makes it clear that Christian faith is completely centred on the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Whoever loves the Lord Jesus welcomes him and his Father interiorly, and thanks to the Holy Spirit receives the Gospel in his or her heart and life. Here we are shown the centre from which everything must go forth and to which everything must lead: loving God and being Christ's disciples by living the Gospel. When Benedict XVI

spoke to you, he used this expression: evangelical spirit. Dear confraternities, the popular piety of which you are an important sign is a treasure possessed by the Church, which the bishops of Latin America defined, significantly, as a spirituality, a form of mysticism, which is “a place of encounter with Jesus Christ”. Draw always from Christ, the inexhaustible wellspring; strengthen your faith by attending to your spiritual formation, to personal and communitarian prayer, and to the liturgy. Down the centuries confraternities have been crucibles of holiness for countless people who have lived in utter simplicity an intense relationship with the Lord. Advance with determination along the path of holiness; do not rest content with a mediocre Christian life, but let your affiliation serve as a stimulus, above all for you yourselves, to an ever greater love of Jesus Christ.

2. The passage of the Acts of the Apostles which we heard also speaks to us about what is essential. In the early Church there was immediately a need to discern what was essential about being a Christian, about following Christ, and what was not. The apostles and the other elders held an important meeting in Jerusalem, a first “council”, on this theme, to discuss the problems which arose after the Gospel had been preached to the pagans, to non-Jews. It was a providential opportunity for better understanding what is essential, namely, belief in Jesus Christ who died and rose for our sins, and loving him as he loved us. But note how the difficulties were overcome: not from without, but from within the Church. And this brings up a second element which I want to remind you of, as Benedict XVI did, namely: ecclesial spirit. Popular piety is a road which leads to what is essential, if it is lived in the Church in profound communion with your pastors. Dear brothers and sisters, the Church loves you! Be an active presence in the community, as living cells, as living stones. The Latin American Bishops wrote that the popular piety which you reflect is “a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling that we are part of the Church” (*Aparecida Document*, 264). This is wonderful! A legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling that we are part of the Church. Love the Church! Let yourselves be guided by her! In your parishes, in your dioceses, be a true “lung” of faith and Christian life, a breath of fresh air! In this Square I see a great variety: earlier on it was a variety of umbrellas, and now of colours and signs. This is also the case with the Church: a great wealth and variety of expressions in which everything leads back to unity; the variety leads back to unity, and unity is the encounter with Christ.

3. I would like to add a third expression which must distinguish you: missionary spirit. You have a specific and important mission, that of keeping alive the relationship between the faith and the cultures of the peoples to whom you belong. You do this through popular piety. When, for example, you carry the crucifix in procession with such great veneration and love for the Lord, you are not performing a simple outward act; you are pointing to the centrality of the Lord’s paschal mystery, his passion, death and resurrection which have redeemed us, and you are reminding yourselves first, as well as the community, that we have to follow Christ along the concrete path of our daily lives so that he can transform us. Likewise, when you express profound devotion for the Virgin Mary, you are pointing to the highest realization of the Christian life, the one who by her faith and obedience to God’s will, and by her meditation on the words and deeds of Jesus, is the Lord’s perfect disciple (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 53). You express this faith, born of hearing the word of God, in ways that engage the senses, the emotions and the symbols of the different cultures ... In doing so you help to transmit it to others, and especially the simple persons whom, in the Gospels, Jesus calls “the little ones”. In effect, “journeying together towards shrines, and participating in other demonstrations of popular piety, bringing along your children and engaging other people, is itself a work of evangelization” (*Aparecida Document*, 264). When you visit shrines, when you bring your family, your children, you are engaged in a real work of evangelization. This needs to continue. May you also be true evangelizers! May your initiatives be “bridges”, means of bringing others to Christ, so as to journey together with him. And in this spirit may you always be attentive to charity. Each individual Christian and every community is missionary to the extent that they bring to others and live the Gospel, and testify to God’s love for all, especially those experiencing difficulties. Be missionaries of God’s love and tenderness! Be missionaries of God’s mercy, which always forgives us, always awaits us and loves us dearly.

Evangelical spirit, ecclesial spirit, missionary spirit. Three themes! Do not forget them! Evangelical spirit, ecclesial spirit, missionary spirit. Let us ask the Lord always to direct our minds and hearts to him, as living stones of the Church, so that all that we do, our whole Christian life, may be a luminous witness to his mercy and love. In this way we will make our way towards the goal of our earthly pilgrimage, towards that extremely beautiful shrine, the heavenly Jerusalem. There, there is no longer any temple: God himself and the lamb are its temple; and the light of the sun and the moon give way to the glory of the Most High. Amen.