

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS  
AT MASS FOR BISHOPS, PRIESTS AND SEMINARIANS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Seeing this Cathedral full of Bishops, priests, seminarians, and men and women religious from the whole world, I think of the Psalmist's words from today's Mass: "Let the peoples praise you, O God" (Ps 66). We are indeed here to praise the Lord, and we do so reaffirming our desire to be his instruments so that not only some peoples may praise God, but all. With the same parrhesia of Paul and Barnabas, we proclaim the Gospel to our young people, so that they may encounter Christ, the light for our path, and build a more fraternal world. I wish to reflect with you on three aspects of our vocation: we are called by God, called to proclaim the Gospel, and called to promote the culture of encounter.

1. *Called by God* – It is important to rekindle an awareness of our divine vocation, which we often take for granted in the midst of our many daily responsibilities: as Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). This means returning to the source of our calling. At the beginning of our vocational journey, there is a divine election. For this reason, a bishop, a priest, a consecrated man or woman, a seminarian cannot have a bad memory. He or she must safeguard that grace and never forget his or her first calling. We were called by God and we were called to be with Jesus (cf. Mk 3:14), united with him in a way so profound that we are able to say with Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This living in Christ, in fact, marks all that we are and all that we do. And this "life in Christ" is precisely what ensures the effectiveness of our apostolate, that our service is fruitful: "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16). It is not pastoral creativity, or meetings or planning that ensure our fruitfulness, but our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). And we know well what that means: to contemplate him, to worship him, to embrace him, especially through our faithfulness to a life of prayer, and in our daily encounter with him, present in the Eucharist and in those most in need. "Being with" Christ does not isolate us from others. Rather, it is a "being with" in order to go forth and encounter others. This brings to mind some words of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "We must be very proud of our vocation because it gives us the opportunity to serve Christ in the poor. It is in the favelas, in the cantegriles, in the villas miseria, that one must go to seek and to serve Christ. We must go to them as the priest presents himself at the altar, with joy" (Mother's Instructions, I, p. 80). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is our true treasure. Let us try to unite our hearts ever more closely to his (cf. Lk 12:34).

2. *Called to proclaim the Gospel* – dear Bishops and priests, many of you, if not all, have accompanied your young people to World Youth Day. They too have heard the mandate of Jesus: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (cf. Mt 28:19). It is our responsibility to help kindle within their hearts the desire to be missionary disciples of Jesus. Certainly, this invitation could cause many to feel somewhat afraid, thinking that to be missionaries requires leaving their own homes and countries, family and friends. God asks us to be missionaries wherever we are, where He puts us! Let us help our young people to realize that the call to be missionary disciples flows from our baptism and is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian. We must also help them to realize that we are called first to evangelize in our own homes and our places of study and work, to evangelize our family

and friends. Let us help our young people, let us open our ears to their questions, they need to be listened to when in difficulty; of course patience is needed to listen, in confession and in spiritual direction. We need to know how best to spend time with them.

Let us spare no effort in the formation of our young people! Saint Paul uses a beautiful expression that he embodied in his own life, when he addressed the Christian community: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19). Let us embody this also in our own ministry! Let us help our young people to discover the courage and joy of faith, the joy of being loved personally by God, who gave his Son Jesus for our salvation. Let us form them in mission, in going out and going forth. Jesus did this with his own disciples: he did not keep them under his wing like a hen with her chicks. He sent them out! We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel! It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people! Let us courageously look to pastoral needs, beginning on the outskirts, with those who are farthest away, with those who do not usually go to church. They are the V.I.P.s invited to the table of the Lord... go and look for them in the nooks and crannies of the streets.

3. *Called to promote the culture of encounter* – Unfortunately, in many places, generally in this economic humanism that prevails in the world, the culture of exclusion, of rejection, is spreading. There is no place for the elderly or for the unwanted child; there is no time for that poor person on the edge of the street. At times, it seems that for some people, human relations are regulated by two modern “dogmas”: efficiency and pragmatism. Dear Bishops, priests, religious and you, seminarians who are preparing for ministry: have the courage to go against the tide. Let us not reject this gift of God which is the one family of his children. Encountering and welcoming everyone, solidarity... this is a word that in this culture is being hidden away, as if it was a swear word... solidarity and fraternity: these are what make our society truly human.

Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter! Permit me to say that we must be almost obsessive in this matter. We do not want to be presumptuous, imposing “our truths”. What must guide us is the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed (cf. Lk 24:13-35).

Dear brothers and sisters, we are called by God, called to proclaim the Gospel and called to promote with courage the culture of encounter. May the Virgin Mary be our exemplar. In her life she was “a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church’s apostolic mission for the regeneration of humanity should be animated” (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 65). Let us ask her to teach us to meet Jesus every day, let us ask her to encourage us to go out to meet our many brothers and sisters who are on the edges and are thirsty for God but do not have anyone to announce Him; let us ask her not to throw us out of home, but to encourage us to leave home; in this way we will be disciples of the Lord.