

**Holy Mass on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord  
and on the occasion of the 1600th Anniversary of the  
foundation of the City of Venice**

**( Venice / Cathedral Basilica of St. Mark, 25 March 2021 )**

**Homily of the Patriarch Francesco Moraglia**

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Prefect, esteemed Authorities, I thank the Official Committee for the 1600 years of the foundation of Venice who wanted to open the commemorative events of this anniversary with this celebration in the Basilica that houses the body of the Evangelist Mark and, with the homonymous Square, it's the symbol of Venice in the world.

I address a particular greeting to the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Malta, Polycarp, and to the Vicar for Venice of Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church, Anba Giovanni.

Venice has always been a city open to meeting and cultural exchange where people, cultures and faiths, even profoundly different from each other, met and shared common paths while respecting their own identities. This is also the path for present and for our future.

I am glad that Professor Jürgen Moltmann, one of the greatest living theologians, is here among us today; he marked the world of reformed theology in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond that. Professor Moltmann indicated Hope as an overall figure of Christianity, specifying that it is completely so only if it is "purified" by the Cross of Christ. The research of Professor Moltmann, then, focused his studies on the theme of Creation and his protection as well as on the energy question; themes, the latter, which are vital for the city of Venice, a true compass for the future of the city that has all the credentials - history and relationship with

the ecosystem - to act as a reference for sustainable development not only on national field but European and global too, also in the wake of the requests received from Pope Francis in particular in the Encyclical "Laudato si".

We are living through difficult years. To find something similar we have to go back to the years after the Second World War. We live in a time when we need true Hope (the one with a capital H), not a counterfeit of it; we need human and Christian Hope as well as air to breathe.

Thus I use Professor Moltmann's thought which I consider intellectually useful to avoid the drift of pessimism: "It [Hope] does not take things as they are. But as things that advance, they move, are transformed, in their possibilities "(Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, Brescia 1970, p.18).

Today, with the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord Jesus to the Virgin Mary, this day leads us to the beginning of the event or, if you like, to the beginning of Christian Hope. Today the Gospel has just reminded us about this.

Virgin Mary becomes the Mother of the Savior of the world and these words, are addressed to Her, which "seal" the incarnation of God's Word, they lead and mark the history forever: "... you will conceive a child, you will give birth to a son and his name will be Jesus. He will be great, and will be named Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the kingdom of David, his father: and he will have rule over the house of Jacob for ever... and of his kingdom there will be no end "(Lk 1: 31-33).

Not surprisingly, on such a significant solemnity, the "Christmas", or the beginning of Venice was placed and today the calendar tells that 1600 years have passed since that March 25th, 421 a.C. which, ideally, was set as the day of its foundation.

Objectively, it is a date with a symbolic rather than historical character. Symbolic does not mean mythical but ideal; this is the testimony of the stately grandiose project of a city that wanted to "build" its destiny on foundations that are not only human and, therefore, transitory but, in some way, transcendent, such as to inspire its development and daily life. Here are the roots!

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a Roman philosopher and politician, contemporary of Jesus, stated: "Ignoranti quem portum petat nullus suus ventus est" that is to say "The wind is never favorable to those who don't know where they are going". Venice - history teaches it - soon learned to sail, not only on the lagoon but also on the open and distant seas, seizing the offered opportunities or those ones provided for itself.

Venice wanted to link its beginnings and its history to the event that founds the Christian Faith and so the city joined the Mother of Jesus, Holy Mary, whom it will always maintain a "direct and uninterrupted" line as allied with.

This is clearly attested by the Basilica of the Madonna della Salute, the major Marian temple of the Venetian Church, which stands where Grand Canal and Giudecca Canal meet each other, facing Saint Mark's Basin.

In the tondo of the floor in the center of the Basilica of Holy Mary of the Health there is an inscription that recalls all this: "Unde origo inde salus". That is: from where (Venice) originated, from there, from (Maria), its salvation came. And that sacred building - we know - had been built and it is there today as an everlasting memory because, really, Holy Mary our Madonna of the Health rescued and saved Venice, almost four centuries ago, facing the spread of the black plague also narrated in the book "I Promessi Sposi" by Alessandro Manzoni: it was the year 1630.

The image of the Annunciation in Venice is found in many representations, in churches and civil buildings that testify how, over the centuries, civil life has always found in Faith the reference to Christian values that Venice wanted weave even in the myth of its foundation.

Yes, salvation comes from Holy Mary and true health is Lord Himself, the Savior, the Divine Child who was born from Her and who was announced to Her by the Angel.

Stating the origins of a city in this way says a lot about the relationship between Faith and City, Faith and politics.

As we know, on the 25th of March 421 a.C.- according to tradition - refers to the first settlements of today's Venice on a little island emerging from the others - called, precisely, Rivus Altus (Rialto) – and it recalls the construction on that site of a church that corresponds to the current Church of Saint Giacometto. Then there is a document - the Chronicon Altinate (XIth century) which adds an interesting detail: that day would have been on 25<sup>th</sup> Holy Monday and, thus, the bond with the Christian Faith becomes even stronger.

At its beginning Venice "identified" itself, in a certain way, with the construction of a church, this tells us how the city was perceived itself not as an absolute reality; on the contrary, it means that there is something that there was "above", then it comes "before" and it remains "after" the city.

Politics, therefore, recognizes that it is not an absolute, capable of bestowing happiness on men; recognizing its own limit, qualifies itself as "good politics", because it has the meaning of its own relativity.

Politics is at service of man, but it cannot stand before man as a hegemonic and all-encompassing power; if it did, it would no

longer respond to what politics has to be.

The originating event, the building of a Church, tells how the dimensions of Christian Faith and Hope are recognized as publicly relevant and not subordinated to political power. All this to guarantee the right to religious freedom which, on its turn, is the key to all other freedoms because it is dealing with the search for the whole man's truth (cf. Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis humanae*, n.3 ).

Facing with the danger of a religious power becoming a confessional power, there is also the danger of a political power that claims to lead the religious community in the Faith and Hope fields.

Yes, as Lucio Anneo Seneca says :“the wind is never favorable to those who don't know where they are going”. For those who have no memory of their past, present and future appear so difficult or even impossible to go through.

For a city that begins its path on the day of the Annunciation, the ethical question becomes as something essential. The "necessary" civil virtues constitute the foundation of every true civitas.

These are the same virtues necessary for the hoped restart and they are Christian, human and civil virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance. How even today these virtues are so essential for citizens and, above all, for those who in every field - cultural, social (intermediate fields), administrative, entrepreneurial, business, political – are aimed to promote the common good.

If in private relationships a person is boundless unwary, unjust, lacking in firmness and he is immoderate, lacks the fundamental moral/civil virtues and how much more such a person will be destabilizing if he were to propose himself as a guarantor of the common good!

Reflecting on these virtues will allow us to overcome the

moments of trial, the bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic delays that slow down the decisions indefinitely in view of also projects (large and small) to be carried out for the good and the future of the city, for its inhabitants, for whom work there and visit it.

Let us return, once again, to the words of Seneca: "The wind is never favorable to those who don't know where they are going". Yes, absolutely we need to know where Venice is going.

The celebration of its 1600th anniversary is an opportunity, offered to us to start over so that the city can restart and rebuild itself as a civil community (civitas) starting from its values, declined to the rhythm of our time.

Venice is a city that was born from the sea and it always lives on water; it has to be seen, as already mentioned, as universal icon of this "ecosystem" and we must know how to get involved by becoming a recognized "laboratory" - also internationally - in thinking big and boldly, about the challenges for the future: climate, environment, artistic creativity, sustainable relationship with Creation, taking advantage of the thoughts that Pope Francis offered us in the Encyclicals "Laudato si" and "Fratelli tutti".

We need to be aware of the uniqueness of Venice (its beauty is not enough); Venice has to become again, back to being "alive", inhabited in everyday life, welcoming, tidy, forged on a human scale, fitted for a child, an elderly person, for a family.

That's why an alliance must be built between generations, between our generation and the future ones, recognizing the right desire of young people to be protagonists who cannot be perennial precarious until middle age.

We have to plan a world based on education and, in general, on training and job as areas where it is necessary to know how to invest ourselves thinking about the future. Without forgetting culture

fields, social field and above all healthy fragilities, as Covid 19 has taught us.

Father and mother who bear and educate their children (the family) constitute, today, a hope and a real wealth for our future and for the society: they allow its regeneration, they are its future. Let us carry out, then, with determination to finally pursue a policy in full support of the family; it is not a question of welfare, but of the welfare-state as an intelligent and far-sighted investment, also on the educational and training fields.

We need to value and mostly underline the peculiarities of our territory: from the lagoon to the coasts and up to the mountains. On clear days, especially in winter, the white Dolomites can be seen from the bell tower of Saint Mark Square. All this tells of the infinite beauty as resource of our territory.

Venice is not only its wonderful historical center - whose this golden Basilica is the sparkling symbol- but more a huge number of beauties to be supported today more than ever: the Lido and the wonderful Islands of the Lagoon including Murano, Burano, Torcello, Mazzorbo, Saint Herasmus , the Vignole and, then, the whole mainland: Mestre, Marghera, the long Coastline, the Riviera .

At last , Venice is its endless cultural and artistic resources - known and less known -, do not forget to mention the products of the food and wine sector and its touristical reception.

The city, however, must hurry up and make up its mind and plan a "system", create a "network", Venice has to call into question responsibility of politics but without unloading on politics the faults that are not of politics and it has to seek, if any, other possible responsibilities where they are.

Its different branches must dialogue and relate more; moving itself at random it makes us weak and we cannot cope with other

territories that know better than we how to create a system and their own network.

The future of Venice also depends on the courage to know how to build it without ever forgetting its origins which today - with this celebration - we wanted to remember and which we will remember throughout this year that starts from today.

These words of Seneca - "The wind is never favorable to those who don't know where they are going" - still are worthy and true today for the Venetians.

The prayer, we began this celebration with, underlines the event we commemorate today - the Word of God who becomes man in Virgin Mary's womb - and asks those who profess Faith in Jesus the Redeemer, true God and true man, to be more involved in his divine nature".

Let's arise the divine imprint that is the basis of man; it makes us more men. At last, with joy, let us rediscover the divine (Christian) reference in the origins of our City, celebrating its birth today.

We trust in the maternal intercession of Holy Mother of all Venetians, our Holy Virgin Mary of the Health our Madonna della Salute.