

Holy Mass of the Chrism
(Venice / Cathedral Basilica of Saint Mark, on 1st April 2021)
Homily of Patriarch Francesco Moraglia

Dear priests,

our affectionate thoughts go to Pope Francis who holds the fullness of the ordained ministry; our constant remembrance in prayer goes to him!

Each of us then, on this day dedicated to the priesthood, would like to thank the Lord for having been called, by pure grace and without our own merit, to the presbyterial ministry.

We thank the confreres, who gave us and give a beautiful witness with their way of living and dying. I would like to remember in particular how many of them the Father has called to Him since last Holy Thursday: Don Aldo Cristinelli, Don Guido Buccioli, Mons. Angelo Centenaro, Don Gianni Dainese, Don Nini Barbato and Don Guido Scattolin. There are those who truly edified us with their testimony and made us grow as priests and as a presbytery.

We also remember those who have lived or are experiencing difficult moments in terms of health or priesthood and we bring them in a particular way in our prayers. We all entrust ourselves and entrust them to our Madonna della Salute, who is an always solicitous and welcoming Mother for all of us.

At last, I would like to thank each of you for the commitment spent with passion and intelligence for the communities entrusted to you in such a difficult time. I tell you all my affection and my closeness not only for what you do but, above all, for who you are.

You know, from daily experience, the many sufferings that in this year of restrictions have weighed and are weighing in a particular way on fragile people, on sick people, on old people, on

children and on young people.

I also address my cordial greeting to our deacons and I remember, with affection, those of them who recently left us; in the last year the deacon Giulio Saltarin and the deacon Franco Scantamburlo.

I express my gratitude to the Lord because we can celebrate the Chrism Holy Mass, one of the most beautiful and significant moments in the life of the Church.

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (see Mt 4,4). Of course, one needs bread, otherwise one dies. But one also needs meaning, that is the intelligence of living, one needs closeness and affection: on the level of Faith, the Eucharistic bread. The Lord grants us the grace to feel these needs in order to become pastors even more involved in the life of people and communities.

The Gospel presents Jesus, in the synagogue of Nazareth, who stands up, receives the scroll of the Scriptures (the meghillah) from the attendant (the hazan) and reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim year of grace acceptable to the Lord "(Lk 4: 18-19). These words for us, today, in time of Covid-19 and due to the consequent restriction of personal freedoms, are more relevant than ever.

We are called to announce the Lord Jesus who gives the Holy Spirit. The Easter gift of Christ is given to the Church in particular in the sacrament of Ordination, in different degrees, to bishops, to priests and to deacons. The Holy Spirit is for the remission of sins, as it is clear from the meeting of the risen Jesus with the disciples on Easter evening (see Jn 20,19-23).

I would like to say a word about our personal availability as priests for listening; this availability is already a real answer to those who come to us; through it we meet the question that has been asked to us.

As far as this is concerned , I remember an episode concerning the poet and writer Rainer Maria Rilke. While living in Paris he often came across a woman asking for charity: "... passersby threw alms in her hat. The beggar remained unperturbed, as if she did not have any soul. One day Rilke just gave her a rose. In that moment her face blossomed again. For the first time, Rilke realized that this woman also had feelings. She smiled, then disappeared and for eight days he no longer saw her begging, because she had been given something that was far more precious than money "(J. Ratzinger - Peter Seewald, God and the world, San Paolo 2001).

We are, therefore, invited to rediscover the language of "closeness" and "affection" through simple signs that will surprise us with their effectiveness.

Offering a rose is everyone's option and, at last , it's worthy much more than many words and than money. As priests, in this time of lack of personal relationships, we are called to bet on the effectiveness of proximity, of closeness, of human warmth. Let us not forget that we are priests "for" people!

On the other hand, when in the ministry one actually pursues only efficiency, then efficiency becomes a mania, a fulfillment of the person and, at last , one ends up - without realizing it - becoming people who tire and bore.

Let us not forget what the apostle Paul writes: "God loves a cheerful giver" (2Cor 9,7). The Evangelist Mark, on the other hand, informs us that Jesus, facing with the poor alms of the widow, exclaimed: "... she put in more than all the others contributors to the

treasury" (Mk 12,43).

God has different criteria than pure efficiency and functionality and Saint Mary, the masterpiece of Creation, from Her conception, was full and complete gratuitousness; She has always been full of grace, Saint Mary the Immaculate.

Dear confreres in the priesthood, you will soon be renewing the promises of ordination. Let's live this gesture with a heart that wants to love.

Then there will be the blessing of the Sacred Oils which, throughout the year, in our diocesan Church will be used to administer the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the sick, and Ordination.

It is not a question of simple rituals or external gestures and words that echo for a few fractions of a second. The Oils - as consecrated by the bishop, who is the guarantor of unity in the particular Church - attest to communion; it is thus an ecclesial gesture that refers to synodality. The liturgy then is a constitutive action of the Church which educates and elevates the people of God, that is to say , the pastors and the faithful.

We are experiencing a change of era and none of us is able to know today where it will lead us. We are facing a paradigm change and we are therefore asked to listen to the Word of God more humbly, in order to better serve our brothers.

Conversion is urgent; first the spiritual one and then the pastoral one that always follows from this; the order should not be disregarded because without the conversion of the heart there is no pastoral conversion. Pastoral care is not a science, but a choice that comes from the heart. Pastoral "techniques" can possibly be studied, but not pastoral care. We follow the instructions of Cardinal John Henry Newman - one of the highest speculative intelligences of his

time - who chose "Cor ad cor loquitur" as his cardinal's motto, which can be translated with "only the heart speaks to the heart."

The invitation is to make ours the biblical spirituality that distinguishes the whole history of salvation according to the trinomial: "exodus", "exile", "stay". It is a matter of a personal and community journey that we are invited to undertake with faith and enthusiasm.

All this means directing oneself and one's communities - living members of our Church - to a spirituality and to a pastoral care that is less focused on one's personal expectations and, instead, more focused on Jesus and His Gospel. All this, however, can only be given if we start from a new spirit that invests our entire presbytery. Finally, it is a question of entering everyone - faithful and pastors - into the spirit of a truly lived, rather than theorized, "synodality".

In this way, individualism and protagonism are avoided which - in the presbytery - are fertile ground for "clericalism", that is, the search for oneself.

Even in listening to the Word of God there is the risk of self-referentiality and this happens every time when the Word is "locked up" within one's own vision of the world, or rather within one's own old man that we carry around with us for life.

On the theological level, the Lutheran theologian Albert Schweitzer had addressed the question in his study on the "History of research on the life of Jesus", which he edited before leaving Europe and going to live with the last ones in Africa, in Lambaréné (in current Gabon). The risk is always the same: finding in the Gospel what one had already decided was there, projecting oneself and one's own culture or ideology into it. How many times it happens, God only knows!

Prophecy is such only if it expresses the Gospel, not a

worldized Gospel made such by a world that has become a criterion of truth. These words of Pope Francis, taken from “*Evangelii gaudium*”, are extremely clear: "Spiritual worldliness, which hides itself behind appearances of religiosity and even being love for the Church, consists in seeking, in place of the glory of the Lord, for human glory and personal well-being ... It is a subtle way of looking for "one's own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). It takes many shapes, depending on the kind of person and condition in which it insinuates itself... "(Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93).

Nobody feels touched, but not even relieved from thinking about.

Commenting on this passage from *Evangelii gaudium*, we can say that it is easy to feel like a prophet while one is only trailing behind the social and political culture of the moment; some people realize it, others don't.

In order to listen to the Word of God one must - which is not easy - free oneself from prejudices by opening up to the spirituality of the "exodus", "exile" and "stay" of Israel, covering the history of salvation in all its stages. Thus, with our communities, we are today called to a difficult crossing of the desert.

The words that Henri de Lubac - an important theologian and a man of true ecclesial sentiment - places at the beginning of his book “*On the ways of God*” remain very current, despite the passing by of the decades: "... what will be more and more relevant is the testimony that God - from generation to generation - gives Himself through some persons, who, wanting to be of His own, thereby give their brothers and sisters the essential Gift [that is, God] "(Henri de Lubac, *Sulle vie di Dio*, Paoline Publishing, Turin 1974).

From the witness of the two Evangelists Matthew and Luke it

appears that Joseph of Nazareth - a man faithful to his vocation - was able to fully embody in his person this spirituality of the "exodus", "exile" and "stay" of Israel.

Pope Francis, in the letter "Patris corde" with which he marks the year of St. Joseph, outlines its spirituality and writes as follows: "Many times, in our life, events occur whose meaning we do not understand ... Joseph leaves aside his reasoning to make room for what is happening and, however mysterious it may appear to his eyes, he welcomes it, assumes responsibility for it and reconciles himself with his own history. If we do not reconcile ourselves with our history, we will not even be able to take a next step, because we will always remain hostage to our expectations and consequent disappointments "(see Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter Patris corde, n.4).

Believing does not mean having chosen an easy life for oneself and for others and this is especially true when one is a guide for others. Rather, faith is expressed in the attitude of those who walk towards God not by pursuing alternative paths or comfortable compromises, but by facing what God places before us, without failing and with a sense of responsibility.

The answer to every vocation (even the priestly one), the Holy Father specifies, does not have its beginning in the gesture of sacrifice but, rather, in the gift of oneself. Also for this reason in Saint Joseph we do not find frustrations or recriminations but trust and joy.

Pope Francis explains that this must be for every vocation and explicitly mentions the vocation to the priesthood where this kind of maturity is required (see Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter Patris corde, n. 7). So let's walk on this path that leads us to where we never even imagined at the beginning... This is it for short, the spiritual profile

of Joseph of Nazareth, that is, the "exodus", the "exile", the "stay" of Israel.

I ask everyone that this Year dedicated to Saint Joseph be enhanced spiritually and pastorally. We entrust to him - the humble and courageous carpenter of Nazareth, whom everyone believed to be the father of Jesus - the Church in Venice, the Presbytery, the Seminary and all the people tried and suffering by the pandemic in progress.

With Saint Joseph and with Saint Mary, together with our communities, let's look with realism and Christian Hope at what we can do to build a coexistence where everything can be thought again and rebuilt, starting from a humanity that knows how to return to rejoice in its own creaturality in the context of a cherished and beloved Creation.