

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FIFTH NATIONAL ECCLESIAL CONGRESS FOR THE CHURCH IN ITALY

*Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence
Tuesday, November 10, 2015*

A New Humanism in Jesus Christ

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Represented in the cupola of this most beautiful Cathedral is the Universal Judgment. Jesus, our light, is at the center. The inscription that one reads at the top of the fresco is "*Ecce Homo*." Looking at this cupola we are attracted to the top, while we contemplate the transformation of the Christ judged by Pilate into the Christ seated on the throne of judges. An Angel brings Him the sword, but Jesus does not assume the symbols of judgment, in fact, He raises His right hand showing the signs of the Passion, because He "gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 *Timothy* 2:6). "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (*John* 3:17).

In the light of this Judge of mercy, our knees bend in adoration, and our hands and our feet are reinvigorated. We can speak of a humanism only from the centrality of Jesus, discovering in Him the features of man's authentic face. It is the contemplation of the face of Jesus dead and risen that reconstructs our humanity, also that humanity fragmented by the toils of life or marked by sin. We must not tame the power of Christ's face. His face is the image of His transcendence. It is the *misericordiae vultus*. Let us allow ourselves to be looked at by Him. Jesus is our humanism. Let us always be anxious about his question: "But who do you say that I am?" (*Matthew* 16:15).

Looking at His face, what do we see? First of all we see the face of an "emptied" God, of a God that has assumed the condition of servant, humiliated and obedient unto death (cf. *Philippians* 2:7). Jesus' face is similar to that of so many of our humiliated brothers, rendered slaves, emptied. God has assumed their face. And that face looks at us. God – who is "the Being of whom one cannot think a greater," as Saint Anselm said, or the always greater God of Saint Ignatius of Loyola – becomes ever greater than Himself by lowering Himself. If we do not lower ourselves we will not be able to see His face. We will not see any of His fullness if we do not accept that God emptied Himself. And, therefore, we will not understand anything of Christian humanism and our words will be beautiful, cultured, refine, but they will not be words of faith. They will be words that sound empty.

I do not wish to design here, in the abstract, a "new humanism," a certain idea of man, but to present with simplicity some traits of Christian humanism, which is that of the "sentiments of Christ Jesus" (*Philippians* 2:5). They are not abstract provisional sensations of the spirit, but represent the warm interior strength that makes us capable of living and of making decisions. What are these sentiments? I would like to present at least three to you today.

The first sentiment is **humility**. "In humility count others better than yourselves" (*Philippians* 2:3), says Saint Paul to the Philippians. Further on the Apostle speaks of the fact that Jesus does not consider His being like God a "privilege" (*Philippians* 2:6). There is a precise message here. The obsession to keep one's glory, one's "dignity," one's influence must

not be part of our sentiments. We must pursue God's glory and this does not coincide with ours. God's glory, which shines in the humility of the cave of Bethlehem and the dishonor of the cross of Christ always surprises us.

Another sentiment of Christ that gives shape to Christian humanism is **unselfishness**. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (*Philippians* 2:4), Saint Paul asks again. Therefore, more than unselfishness, we must seek the happiness of the one beside us. A Christian's humanity is always outgoing. It is not narcissistic, self-referential. When our heart is rich and is very self-satisfied, then there is no longer room for God. Please, let us avoid "shutting ourselves in structures that give us a false protection, in norms that are transformed in implacable judgments, in habits in which we feel tranquil" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). Our duty is to work and struggle to make this world a better place. Our faith is revolutionary by an impulse that comes from the Holy Spirit. We must follow this impulse to come out of ourselves, to be men according to Jesus' Gospel. May life be decided on the capacity to give oneself. It is there that it transcends itself, that it arrives at being fruitful.

A further sentiment of Christ Jesus is that of **beatitude**. A Christian is a blessed, if he has in himself the joy of the Gospel. The Lord points out the way to us in the Beatitudes. By following it we human beings can attain an authentically more human and divine happiness. Jesus speaks of the happiness that we experience only when we are poor in spirit. For the great Saints beatitude has to do with humiliation and poverty. But there is also much of this beatitude in the humblest part of our people: it is the one that knows the richness of solidarity, of sharing even the little one has, the richness of the daily sacrifice of work, sometimes hard and badly paid, but carried out of love for dear persons, and also for one's own miseries, which, however, lived in trust of the providence and mercy of God the Father, nourish a humble greatness.

The Beatitudes that we read in the Gospel begin with a blessing and end with a promise of consolation. They introduce us on a way of possible greatness, that of the spirit, and when the spirit is ready all the rest comes on its own. Of course if we do not have our heart open to the Holy Spirit, it will seem baloney because it does not lead us to "success." To be "blessed," to relish the consolation of friendship with Jesus Christ, it is necessary to have an open heart. Beatitude is a laborious wager, made up of renunciations, listening and learning, whose fruits will be gathered in time, giving us an incomparable peace: "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (*Psalms* 34:9)!

Humility, Unselfishness, Beatitude: these are the three traits that I wish to present today to your meditation on Christian humanism, which is born from the humanity of the Son of God. And these traits also say something to the Italian Church that is gathered today, to walk together as an example of solidarity. These traits tell us that we must not be obsessed by "power," even when it takes the face of a useful and functional power for the social image of the Church. If the Church does not assume the sentiments of Jesus, she is disoriented; she loses the meaning. Instead, if she assumes them, she is able to live up to her mission. Jesus' sentiments tell us that a Church that thinks of herself and of her own interests will be sad. Finally, the Beatitudes are the mirror in which we should look at ourselves, which permits us to know if we are walking in the right way: it is a mirror that does not lie.

A Church that has these traits—humility, unselfishness, beatitude—is a Church that is able to recognize the Lord's action in the world, in the culture, in the daily life of the people. I

have said it more than once and I repeat it again to you today: I prefer a bumpy, wounded and soiled Church for having gone out through the streets, rather than a sick Church because she is closed in the comfortableness of holding on to her own certainties. I do not want a Church concerned to be at the center and that ends up enclosed in a tangle of obsessions and procedures" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). However, we know that temptations exist; the temptations to be faced are so many. I will present at least two. Do not get frightened; this will not be a list of temptations, as those fifteen that I said to the Curia!

The first of them is the Pelagian. It pushes the Church not to be humble, unselfish and blessed. And it does so with the appearance of a good. Pelagianism leads us to have trust in the structures, in the organizations, in the plans, which are perfect because they are abstract. Often it even leads us to assume a style of control, of hardness, of normativity. The norm gives to the Pelagian the security of feeling superior, of having a precise orientation. He finds his strength in this, not in the lightness of the Spirit's breath. In face of evils or problems of the Church it is useless to seek solutions in conservatism and fundamentalism, in the restoration of surmounted conduct and forms that do not even have culturally the capacity to be significant. Christian Doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, questionings, but it is alive, it is able to disquiet, it is able to encourage. It does not have a rigid face; it has a body that moves and develops; it has tender flesh: Christian Doctrine is called Jesus Christ. The reform of the Church then—and the Church is always reforming—is alien to Pelagianism. It does not exhaust itself in an umpteenth plan to change the structures. It means, instead, to be grafted and rooted in Christ, allowing oneself to be led by the Spirit. Then everything will be possible with genius and creativity.

The Italian Church must let herself be led by her powerful breath and hence sometimes disquieting breath. She must always assume the spirit of her great explorers, who on ships were passionate about navigation in the open sea and not frightened by frontiers and tempests. May she be a free Church, open to the challenges of the present, never vulnerable out of fear of losing something. May she never be vulnerable out of fear of losing something. And encountering people along their streets, may she assume the resolution of Saint Paul. "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 *Corinthians* 9:22).

A second temptation to overcome is that of Gnosticism. It leads to trust in logical and clear reasoning, which, however, loses the tenderness of the brother's flesh. The fascination of Gnosticism is that of "a faith closed in subjectivism, where only a determined experience is of interest or a series of reasons and knowledge that one believes can comfort and illuminate, but where the subject in the end remains closed in the immanence of his own reason and his sentiments" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 94). Gnosticism cannot transcend. The difference between Christian transcendence and some form of Gnostic spiritualism lies in the mystery of the Incarnation. Not to put into practice, not to lead the Word to the reality, means to build on sand, to remain in a pure idea and to degenerate into intimism that does not give fruit, that renders its dynamism sterile.

The Italian Church has great Saints by whose example they can help her to live the faith with humility, unselfishness and gladness, from Francis of Assisi to Philip Neri. But we also think of the simplicity of invented personages, such as Don Camillo who teams up with Peppone. I am struck by how, in Guareschi's stories, the prayer of a good parish priest is united to evident closeness with the people. Don Camillo said of himself: "I am a poor country priest

who knows his parishioners one by one, who loves them, who knows their sorrows and joys, who suffers and is able to laugh with them." Closeness to the people and prayer are the key to live a popular, humble, generous and happy Christian humanism. If we lose this contact with the people faithful to God we lose in humanity and go nowhere.

But then, what must we do, Father? – you might say. What is the Pope asking of us? It is up to you to decide: people and Pastors together. Today I simply invite you to raise your head and contemplate once again the *Ecce Homo* that we have above our heads. Let us pause to contemplate the scene. We turn to Jesus who is represented here as Universal Judge. What will happen "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the Angels with Him, then He will sit on his glorious throne" (*Matthew 25:34-36*). There comes to mind the priest who received a very young priest who gave testimony. However, He could also say: "Depart from me, your cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his Angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (*Matthew 25:41-43*).

The Beatitudes and the words we have just read on the Universal Judgment help us to live the Christian life at the level of holiness. They are few, simple but practical words. Two pillars: the Beatitudes and the words of the Last Judgment. May the Lord give us the grace to understand this message of His! And we look once again at the features of Jesus' face and at his gestures. We see Jesus who eats and drinks with sinners (*Mark 2:16; Matthew 11:19*); let us contemplate Him while He speaks with the Samaritan woman (*John 4:7-26*); let us watch Him while He meets at night with Nicodemus (*John 7:33*); let us relish with affection the scene of Him who has his feet anointed by a prostitute (cf. *Luke 7:36-50*); let us feel His saliva on the tip of our tongue, which is thus loosed (*Mark 7:33*). Let us admire the attraction of all the people "that surround his disciples, namely us, and let us experience their "gladness and simplicity of heart" (*Acts 2:46*).

I ask the Bishops to be Pastors, nothing more: Pastors. May this be your joy: "I am a Pastor." It will be the people, your flock that will sustain you. Recently I read about a Bishop who was in the Metro during the rush hour and there were so many people that he no longer knew where to put his hand to hold on. Pushed from right to left, he leaned on persons not to fall. And so he thought that, in addition to prayer, what makes a Bishop stand is his people. May nothing and no one take from you the joy of being supported by your people. As Pastors, do not be preachers of complex doctrines, but heralds of Christ, dead and risen for us. Point to the essential, to the *kerygma*. There is nothing more solid, profound and certain than this proclamation. But may it be all the People of God that proclaim the Gospel, people and Pastors, I hope. I expressed this pastoral concern of mine in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. nn. 111-134).

I recommend to the whole Italian Church what I indicated in that Exhortation: the social inclusion of the poor, who have a privileged place in the People of God, and the capacity of encounter and dialogue to foster social friendship in your country, seeking the common good. The option for the poor is a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, attested by the whole Tradition of the Church" (John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42). This option "is implicit in Christological faith in that God who made Himself poor for us, to enrich us through His poverty" (Benedict XVI, Address to the Opening Session of the 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate). The poor know well Christ Jesus'

sentiments because they know the suffering Christ by experience. “We are called to discover Christ in them, to loan them our voice in their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them and to receive the mysterious wisdom that God wills to communicate to us through them” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 198).

May God protect the Italian Church from every surrogate of power, of image, of money. Evangelical poverty is creative, receives, supports and is rich in hope. We are here in Florence, city of beauty. How much beauty in this city has been put at the service of charity! I am thinking of the Hospital of the Innocents, for instance. One of the first Renaissance architectures, it was created for the service of abandoned children and desperate mothers. Often these mothers left, together with the newborns, medals cut in half with which they hoped, when presenting the other half, to be able to recognize their own children in better times. See, we must imagine that our poor have a cut medal. We have the other half. Because Mother Church has in Italy half of the medal of all and she recognizes all her abandoned, oppressed, exhausted children. And this has always been one of your virtues, because you know well that the Lord shed his Blood not for some, or for a few or for many but for all.

In a special way, I also recommend to you the capacity to dialogue and to encounter. To dialogue is not to negotiate. To negotiate is to try to take one’s “slice” of the common cake. This is not what I mean, but it is to seek the common good for all. Discuss together, I dare say get angry together, think of the best solutions for all. Many times a meeting is involved in conflict. There is conflict in dialogue: it is logical and foreseeable that it be so. And we must not fear it or ignore it, but accept it. We must accept “to accept to endure the conflict, to resolve it and to transform it into a ring of connection of a new process” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 227).

However, we must always remember that there is no genuine humanism that does not see love as a bond between human beings, be it of an inter-personal nature, profound, social, political or intellectual. Founded on this is the necessity of dialogue and of encounter to build the civil society together with others. We know that the best answer to the conflictive nature of the human being, of the famous *homo homini lupus* of Thomas Hobbes, is the “*Ecce Homo*” of Jesus who does not recriminate, but receives and, paying in person, saves.

Italian society is built when its diverse cultural riches can dialogue constructively: the popular, the academic, the youthful, the artistic, the technological, the economic, the political, the media ... May the Church be ferment of dialogue, of encounter and of unity. Moreover, our formulations of faith themselves are the fruit of dialogue and encounter between cultures, and different communities and entities. We must not be afraid of dialogue: in fact it is precisely confrontation and criticism that help us to keep theology from being transformed into ideology.

In addition, remember that the best way to dialogue is not to talk and argue, but to do something together, to build together, to make plans but not on our own, between Catholics, but together with all those who have good will – and without the fear of carrying out the necessary exodus to every genuine dialogue. Otherwise it is not possible to understand the other’s reasons, or to understand in depth that a brother counts more than the positions that we judge far from our own though genuine certainties. He is a brother.

But the Church must also be able to give a clear answer in face of the threats that arise within the public debate: this is one of the ways of the specific contribution of believers to the building of the common society. Believers are citizens. And I say it here, in Florence, where art,

faith and citizenship have always been in a dynamic balance between denunciation and proposal. The nation is not a museum, but a collective work in permanent construction in which the things that differentiate one, including political and religious membership, are to be put in common.

I appeal above all “to you, young people, because you are strong,” said the Apostle John (1 *John* 2:14). Young people, overcome apathy. May no one scorn your youth, but learn to be models in speaking and acting (cf. 1 *Timothy* 4:12) I ask you to be builders of Italy, to get to work for a better Italy. Please, do not look at life from the balcony, but commit yourselves, immerse yourselves in the wide social and political dialogue. May the hands of your faith be raised to Heaven, but may they do so while building a city constructed on relations in which the love of God is the foundation. And thus you will be free to accept today’s challenges, to live the changes and the transformations.

It can be said that today we do not live in an age of change but in a change of age. Therefore, the situations we are living today pose new challenges, which, for us at times are difficult to understand. Our times require that we live problems as challenges and not as obstacles: the Lord is active and at work in the world. Therefore, you must go out to the streets and to the crossroads: call all those you find, exclude no one (cf. *Matthew* 22:9). Above all, accompany the one who remained at the side of the street, “the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb,” (*Matthew* 15:30). Wherever you are, never build walls or borders, but Squares and field hospitals.

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I am pleased with a restless Italian Church, always closer to the abandoned, the forgotten, the imperfect. I desire a happy Church with the face of a mother, who understands, accompanies and caresses. You also dream of this Church; believe in her; innovate with freedom. The Christian humanism you are called to live affirms radically the dignity of every person as Son of God; it establishes between every human being an essential fraternity, it teaches to understand work, to inhabit Creation as a common home, it furnishes reasons for joy and humor, also in the midst of a life that is so often hard.

Although it is not for me to say how to realize this dream today, allow me to leave one indication with you for the forthcoming years: in every community, in every parish and institution, in every Diocese and circumscription, in every region seek to begin, in a synodal way, a deeper reflection on *Evangelii Gaudium*, to draw practical criteria from it and to act on its dispositions, especially on the three or four priorities that you have singled out in this Congress. I am certain of your ability to get into a creative movement to concretize this study. I am sure of it because you are an adult Church, very ancient in the faith, solid in roots and ample in fruits. Therefore, be creative in expressing that genius that your greats, from Dante to Michelangelo, expressed in a matchless way. Believe in the genius of Italian Christianity, which is not the patrimony either of individuals or of an elite, but of the community, of the people of this extraordinary country.

I entrust you to Mary, who here in Florence is venerated as “Most Holy Annuziata.” In the fresco found in the Basilica with the same name--where I will go shortly – the Angel is silent and Mary speaks saying: “*Ecce ancilla Domini.*” All of us are in those words. May the whole Italian Church speak them with Mary. Thank you.