

Address of Pope Francis to the Third Worldwide Priests' Retreat

■ Basilica of St. John Lateran, Rome, Italy. June 12, 2015



In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit [Amen]. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and all will be created, and you will renew the face of the earth. Amen. Mary, Mother of the Church, [pray for us]

Good afternoon. I am going to speak Castilian, because they told me that everyone can understand because there is simultaneous translation... Is that so? [Applause]

In fact, I know that yesterday you had the Day of Reconciliation, and that you have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as brothers, and that you confessed to one another. That's good; otherwise the poor confessor who would hear your confessions would have ended up destroyed [Laughter].

First of all, I want to thank those who organized this Third Worldwide Priests' Retreat: Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS, I want to thank them for organizing it, and also for HOW they have organized it. I am glad to see bishops together with priests. This is one of the most beautiful things in a local Church: when the bishop is near, close to the priests, even if they should disagree, even when they fight like brothers, but the bishop, as a father, is close to the priest; when the bishop does not keep a princely distance from

the priest... and that is a grace that I see God has given here. Brother-bishops, brother-priests, side by side, it should be like this in each diocese: the proximity, the "neighbourliness"... the nearness of the priest to the bishop.

It goes both ways... Because priests like to gossip about the bishops too! If you have something to say to your bishop that he is not going to like, tell him to his face like men, like men. And if the bishop has something to say to a priest, which he is not going to like, tell him to his face, like a man, like a father, and with kindness.

Only the Holy Spirit can build such a community. We can ask for it. But we need shepherds; shepherd-priests who are near to God's people; shepherd-bishops who are near to God's people, and to their priests.

Will there be clashes within the Church? This is nothing new! Because from the very beginning, What saved the primitive Church from divisions? The courage of Paul to say to one's face what needed to be said, the courage of the Apostles to gather and talk things out. What a beautiful formula, which shows the nearness of priests and bishops, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." because where there is proximity, the Holy Spirit is there. That is the grace that we need to ask continuously

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

for each local Church, the “neighbourliness” between the bishop, his priests, and the faithful; and the priests with the faithful and their bishop.

Well, I am happy to see you together here. Of course you will fight afterwards, you will argue, but, praise God! Because a Church where there are no arguments is dead. Do you know where there are no discussions? At the cemeteries no one discusses anything, no one! Even the son-in-law brings flowers to his mother-in-law, because he knows they will not argue.

I am glad to see priests from the ends of the earth in the first rows. I am glad to see my Vicar of Rome, sitting over there just like anyone else, without a special chair... just as one among many.

I also want to thank the people who are serving in the various ministries, which make this retreat possible. In a special way, I want to thank women, who are not priests, but who are here, nonetheless. The women also were there, when the Holy Spirit came down, they were there, with them. They did not celebrate the Mass, but they were there. The feminine genius in the Church is a gift. Because the Church is Woman; it is “la” Church, not “el” Church . The Church is the Bride of Christ, the Mother of the holy and faithful people of God. The Church is Woman, and these women who are here, are an image and likeness of the Church and of Mother Mary. I want to thank them, in a special way, for their collaboration, and I ask them not to forget, in the face of some ‘feminists’ – using the word



loosely – claims, that Mary is much more important than the Apostles.

Yes, truly, today is the solemnity of the Sacred Heart, and this is not a mere coincidence. It is the day in which the Lord wanted us to reflect on the infinite and merciful love of the Father, shown in the Heart of His Son Jesus with the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Priests that are transformed by Love, Trinitarian Love.

Once they asked blessed Paul VI, if he had to choose only one bible verse, Which one would he choose? And, without any hesitation, he said, “God is love”.

The call to the ministerial priesthood is, first of all, a call of love. Our reply is a reply of love. It is true that no one among us, at the moment of giving the first reply, had a totally pure motivation. Yes, there was a good motivation, but always mixed with secondary motivations which, if we persevere in loving, are purified with time. This is the way of holiness through love. The call of Jesus to you, to us, is a call of love. There is a lovely song of Father Luke Casaert which you, the “Spiritist” [laughter] use to sing. He is a Belgian missionary who has been working in Bolivia for over forty years, a lover of Jesus... This song is called, “What a token [of love] you have given me, Lord”. “What a token [of love] when you called me / When you chose me / When you told me that you are my friend / What joy I feel when I say your name / What excitement stirs within me / When quietly I listen to your Word / Who enlivens my inner silence”.

I do not know if you know how to sing it [Yes! What a token [of love] when you called me / When you chose me / When you told me that you are my friend / What a token [of love] you have given me, Lord”].

A token of love... I ask you—but do not answer out loud—when you are lonely, tired, weary with temptations, when one of you has fallen in love, Are you still capable of going before the tabernacle and sing it to the Lord? Do not answer. But do not forget, at the worse moments, even when you are angry with the Lord, or when you have been unfaithful to the Lord; be not afraid. Draw near to the tabernacle, and sing it to Him

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

again. In those moments, say to the Lord, “I am rubbish, see what I have done, see what I am enduring, see what is happening to me”, and tell Him, “but you have given me a token [of your love], and let your tears roll down your cheeks... That will be a moment of great holiness, even if you are in mortal sin, because He forgives you right there, because it is a dialogue of love. Afterwards, go to the priest, and let him “clean your chimney”, right? But, know how to sing to the Lord. Do not ever forget that, one day, he told you “I do not call you servants, but my friends” “You told me that you are my friend... what a token, Lord”. A call of love to which we can only reply with love. In Naples I told the seminarians, that if Jesus is not the centre of their lives, they should delay their ordination. They should not be hasty. I say the same to you deacons, present here. When a man or a woman falls in love, they cannot stop talking about their beloved. The name of their beloved comes off their lips naturally several times a day. The same is true of a priest who is in love with Jesus: it is evident, and it is noticeable, even when he is tired like a mop on the floor, but he has something: such a contagious love.

God's people, with that *sensus fidei*, which according to the Council is *infallibile credendi*, knows to recognize immediately when a priest is in love with Jesus, or when he is a functionary with a fixed schedule, attached to the letter of the law.

A priest that becomes a functionary, like a city clerk, ends up neurotic: he yells at people, mistreats them: he lacks love, either he has lost his love, or his level of love is too low. He has forgotten how to converse about love with his Lord, that his call is a call of love.

Or a priest attached to the law, he is like those doctors of the law described in Matthew 23, those whom Jesus called ‘hypocrites’. Please, let there be no duplicity in your heart, let there be no duplicity; let there be love, not hypocrisy, let there be mercy, let there be tenderness.

Something that always impressed me of that 23rd chapter of Matthew is that, when Jesus spoke to those

men so attached to the law, “you shall honour your father and mother”—and I am paraphrasing the idea of Jesus—if mom or dad are in need, you must help them. But if you say, “no I have made a vow, I will give all my money to the Church, you betray love in order to hide behind the law. Remember this always. It is a

pointed example, because Jesus sets, as an example, this commandment—the greatest and noblest after the love of God, the fourth one, the only one that has a promise attached to it—and contrasts it to the hypocrisy of attachment to the law.

Please, be merciful with the people. It is true that people are wearisome. A priest, who all his life had been a literature teacher in the university, in schools, a Jesuit... When he retired, at almost seventy years of age, he asked the Provincial Superior to send him to a poor neighbourhood, to a slum... and he became a parish priest there. He wanted to be a shepherd close to the people instead of from the cathedra (you can also be a shepherd from the cathedra). He belonged to the same community where I was, the faculty of theology.

One day he told me, “Look, tell all your theology professors, that they are missing two theses of ecclesiology” “What?” I asked. “Yes, there are two theses of ecclesiology and they are: ‘God's people are ontologically Olympic’ and ‘essentially bothersome’”, that is, people are wearisome. This is the priestly weariness, the weariness of service.

When a priest gets home at night, tired, he does not need sleeping pills. He goes to bed in peace.

The first motivation to evangelize... I do not want to go overtime... excuse me, At what time is Mass? [At nine, at nine] At five? A question, Is the simultaneous translation working fine? [Yes] Are all of you able to hear? [Yes]

“**God's people
[...] knows
to recognize
immediately when
a priest is in love
with Jesus.**”

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

The first motivation to evangelize is the love of Jesus: The love we receive, the experience of being saved by Him, which moves us to love Him ever more. Know you have been “saved”. I recommend you to read Ezekiel 16, and each one of you will see yourself in this story, which is the story of the people of Israel that falls into prostitution, that forsakes the Lord. Each one of you read in that history your own story. But the most important thing is the end; there is the truth of each one of us. When God tells His people, “Look, with all you have done to me, with your behaviour, your adulteries, your unfaithfulness, to your own shame, I am going to place you over your sisters, over other peoples”.

Each priest, feel in your heart that, in spite of your failures, your unfaithfulness, and even because of them, Jesus appoints you to serve His people. That is a very beautiful thing: when we see how little we are, when we feel shame that he should place us, not as his servants, but as his friends, to serve his people. And that love is what moves us to evangelize, to bring the message of Jesus, to speak of the Beloved, to show Him... if we do not feel an immense desire to share Him, we need to ask Him in prayer to enthral us again.

An experience you all have had—I have experienced it many times during morning Mass in St. Martha, which is like a small parish—when those old couples come, after fifty, sixty years of marriage. I see them, how they hold hands, and they ask for the blessing of the rings. I ask them, “Who endured who?” “Both” they answer. This is

mature love, love that grows with life and that does not become disillusioned. Perhaps when they were young, their caresses were more passionate, but now that they are old, their caresses are very tender. Also for the priest, as he makes the journey of love with Jesus, feels the caresses of his Master in a different way, seeking him, sharing him, and loving him with mature caresses, with renewed caresses, with more genuine caresses. Amen. Let him love you, open your hearts to him. And not just gaze upon Jesus, but also letting him gaze upon me, letting him look at me. “Here am I, Lord”. Doing this is not easy when we are tired, overwhelmed... and sometimes sleepiness overcomes and one falls asleep before the tabernacle... that is a beautiful prayer, because you are letting Him look at you, sleeping, like a father that looks at his sleeping child... if you fall asleep before the tabernacle, do not be troubled, he is looking at you. Let him look at you, but go there, before him, in prayer, do not ever abandon your prayer.

In another diocese I used to ask the priests, suddenly, “Tell me, How do you go to bed?” and they did not understand, “Yes, in the evening, How do you go to bed, how do you finish your day?” and they would tell me, many of them (most of them), “I arrive home exhausted, eat something, lay down, watch TV for a while, and afterwards I fall asleep”. What a pity! You finished your day without letting your friend gaze on you; you ended your day without gazing on your friend.

Being before the tabernacle could be boring, dry. It is



ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

not a TV set. But Love is there. If you know not what to say, tell him, "I am tired", if you fall asleep before the Lord, let Him look at you, let the Holy Spirit pray for you from within, in that dialogue that is a dialogue of love, without words.

Evangelizing presupposes this love, presupposes being in love, yielding to this love. And, How to speak about Jesus? One more thing... How to speak about Jesus' love to the people? How to preach? Or, allow me a neologism, How to "Kerygmaticize"? How to communicate the Kerygma with the certainty that the Holy Spirit gives?

Oh, my goodness! The homilies! Please, have pity on God's faithful people. A priest from Rome told me that when visiting his parents who live far away from here, his father told him, "I am so happy! My friends and I found a Church where they say Mass without a homily". Or, What about when, during the homily, the men go out to smoke a cigarette, because they cannot endure the priest? I do not know. They told me recently that, in a parish Church, a priest has preached about the antichrist, the loss of faith in Europe, even about ecumenism within such a catastrophic panorama of confusion. What a pity, what a loss of time. I read in a tablet what he had written.

People cannot take in more than eight minutes. That is all they can take, they switch off after that. And they need to hear words spoken from the heart to their hearts.

We had a homiletics teacher who used to tell us, "one idea, one image, and one feeling". That is all a homily needs. What do I want to give? Look for an idea. What image am I going to use to give it? And, What feelings do I want to present and to provoke?

Some people told me that in the *Evangelii Gaudium* I devoted too much time to the homily, but that is the everyday drama of our Churches! There are homilies that are excellent lectures, yes, they are good; or excellent classes of theology, but do not reach the heart. They forget

that the homily is neither a lecture, nor a catechetical class: it is a sacramental. The word of God in the homily

is between the *ex-opere-operato* and the *ex-opera-operantis*. It is right there. It is doing the best I can to let the Holy Spirit speak through me, so that He can touch the heart. Yes, it is a positive language, not so much a threatening one. The homilies' structure, to be simple, should include a Kerygmatic proclamation, with a brief catechesis on it—one point that

we would touch on, and one implication on our behaviour, that is, a moral implication. Generally speaking, most homilies omit the first two points and go straight to the third, they are moralizing, what we should do or not do. That is not a homily; that is a class on morality, a moral catechesis.

We should give to the people of God homilies born out of prayer. You can get together, two or three priests, to prepare them. I know of some priests that get together on Mondays or Tuesdays to prepare the Sunday homily, and they pray on them during the week.

Do not chase away the people of God, please. Do not scare them, do not waste time. Talk about Jesus, a faith anchored on Christ, the Good News of the Kingdom, the revolution of the Beatitudes, the Love that changes the heart so that the heart in love can become a witness to Jesus, and talk about His love, which is stronger than hate and death. The love of Jesus has vanquished Satan and death; it is stronger than any murderous terrorism. We are called by Love to be like Jesus Christ, to love without limits, to love in all circumstances.

It saddens me, for example, when a parish priest refuses to baptize a baby because he is the son of a single mother, or the son of parents in a second marriage. They have no right to do that... Baptism should never be denied. Remember this. Do not chase away God's faithful people. I know this not by hearsay, but I myself saw it

“**We had a homiletics teacher who used to tell us, “one idea, one image, and one feeling”. That is all a homily needs.**”

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

in my homeland. I remember a poor girl—I do not know, perhaps twenty years old—with a baby. She waited for me after Mass in a parish Church, and told me, “Father, if you can... Would you baptize my baby?” “—of course, I will tell the pastor to baptize him for you” and she told me, “I went to that parish and they refused to do it”. That poor girl, who had the courage to bring that child into this world, being alone, she who had not refused giving birth to her child, as it is so easily done nowadays! And the Church refuses her Baptism! Who do we think we are? Are we Puritans? Please, a Church without Jesus, without mercy, no. Do not chase away God’s faithful people. When this happens, when the heart of a priest is bureaucratic and attached to the letter of the law, the Church, which is a Mother, becomes a step-mother.

Please, let the people feel always that the Church is their Mother. “But Father, I do not know, there are some things in confession that cannot be forgiven, according to the books of moral theology, I can see that it is not expedient...” if someone asks me that question, I tell them that Jesus has already answered, “seventy times seven”.

In Buenos Aires, there is a confessor, three years younger than me, who has the charism of confession. He is a friar. He has long lines, all day long. He spends his days in the confessional, because the people spread the word, “he knows, he forgives, he listens, he gives you good advice...” and everyone gets in that line: priests, simple people, not-so-simple people... there they go, the line of sinners. It reminds me of the line of those who went to be baptized

by John the Baptist. One day that priest came to see me, for we are friends, and told me, “Look, at times I am very much afraid of being unfaithful to the Lord, as it seems that I forgive too easily, and too much. Sometimes I suffer from scruples”. And I tell him, “Luis, What should you do when you suffer from scruples?” “I go to the tabernacle, and I look at the Lord, and tell him, ‘forgive me, Lord, I forgave too much today, too much. But it is not my fault: It is you who set for me a bad example”.

That they have to repeat... that prayer, “be merciful, be merciful...” “Didn’t you promise me that you were not going to do such and such again?” There is a moral principle that is very clear: At what is impossible, nemo tenetur. There are people who are slaves of bad habits that they cannot overcome, or for situations that cannot be regularized because there are children involved. The simple fact that a person comes and kneels in a confessional is a sign of repentance, and the gesture comes before the word, it is a gesture of repentance, and the fact that someone comes with this gesture to the confessional is a sign of a desire to change. Sometimes human limitations are so many that only the embrace and the tenderness of Holy Mother Church can understand that, to the impossible, nemo tenetur, and with the kindness of Christ could tell him, “go in peace, and sin no more”.

There was a priest in Buenos Aires, whom I met when I was a boy. I lost track of him but later I found him again, as an old man, when I was in the seminary. He was a



ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

poet. He used to write beautiful poetry, especially to the Virgin. And he expresses to the Virgin the sinfulness of his heart, and tells her—in a poem—that he is a sinner, and promises that, “no more! This time, today, is, definitely, a brand new start. This evening, my promise is sincere”. And the last stanza is very beautiful, he ends by saying, “this evening, Lady, my promise is sincere... but—just in case—do not forget to leave the key outside for me”.

Let every penitent leave the confessional knowing that the key will always be outside for him, and that he can always return to that door. Am I clear? Mercy in the confessional. Mercy.

Well, I do not want to continue, this is getting too long...

Love transforms and spreads... there is... I skipped a few things I had written... but I touched on them somehow... because I want you to have time for questions, otherwise we will get behind too much and at the end, instead of leaving in consolation, you will leave in desolation and numbness.

There is a problem which is a scandal... it is a scandal. It is the problem of the division among Christians... it is the problem of the division among Christians. Ecumenism is not just another thing to do, it is a command of Jesus, a command He expressed at the moment before being delivered up to death. “Father, may all be one, as you and I are one, so that the world may believe that it is you who have sent me”.

Ecumenism is not just a task. It is seeking the unity of the Body of Christ, broken by our sins of division.

This afternoon I was preparing a speech for the Catholic and Orthodox Czechs, who will come to Rome next week to celebrate 600 years since the death of Hus. I believe he was burned alive. We are scandalized by, for example, what the ISIS did to that poor pilot, burning him alive in a cage. Yet we ourselves, in our own history, have done

the same. We have hurt Holy Mother Church. In our conscience there should be asking for forgiveness for the history of our family. Those times when we have killed in the name of God—the Thirty-years War, where Catholics and Calvinists killed each other, both in the name of Jesus Christ. It is a family scandal.

It is our task now that there is an ecumenical conscience, that Jesus, through His Spirit, gives us the grace to discover this way: He invites us to seek the unity of the Body of Christ, seeking it first of all within our hearts. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Ecumenism must penetrate our shepherds' heart. The wounds of the past, to be healed, should be placed in the heart of Jesus—Do it today. If we put Jesus at the centre, his commandment of love will be fulfilled. Today, What is the Spirit saying to us? I would tell you this: see how many differences there are among us. I believe that an ordinary Christian does not know what is the difference between a Lutheran, an Orthodox, a Calvinist, a Catholic, an Evangelical, and a Baptist... he does not know. However, there are those who know it very well: those who hate Christ. Look at today's martyrs. Look at the blood of men and women who die for Jesus Christ. Those who kill them know that they are the same, they

are one; they believe in Christ! They know perfectly well that they are one, and they care not for the differences.

This is the ecumenism of blood that we are living today. It is the mingled blood of our martyrs. There is a confession from the devil: ‘they are Christians, they must be exterminated.’

In them we are already one. I remember that once, in Germany,

a Parish priest from Hamburg was working on the canonization cause of another priest beheaded (at the guillotine), by the Nazis, because he taught catechism to children. And while studying the documents, he realized that a Lutheran pastor had also been beheaded,

“
Ecumenism is not just a task. It is seeking the unity of the Body of Christ, broken by our sins of division.
”

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE THIRD WORLDWIDE PRIESTS' RETREAT

after the priest, for the same motive: teaching catechism to children—and their blood was mingled. The priest working on the canonization process went to the bishop (who was not the bishop of Hamburg, because there was no bishopric there at that time) and said, “Either I work on both causes together, or I stop right now”.

Fifty years ago, when Paul VI canonized the catechist martyrs of Uganda, who were half Catholic and half Anglican, he was very close to canonizing them together, and he even mentioned them during the homily. He realized that the shedding of blood unites. This kind of ecumenism is already present. We are already one in the blood of the martyrs, let us not forget that.

And also the spiritual ecumenism, praying much for each other, greeting each other... some could tell me, “But Father, there are some men who do business with this or that...” You need to be discerning, but with a heart open to unity, so that this scandal that we Christians are giving to the world could end once and for all.

Each time you face a difficult decision, above all about mercy, ask yourself, “What would Jesus do in my place? This question can help you.

And, before we go to the questions and answers, to finish, I would like to mention a temptation. [The Pope pauses to drink some water.] Forgive me, I see that the difference between a bishop and a priest is that the bishop has a glass and the priest drinks from the water bottle. [Laughter and applause]

Sometimes we are tempted to believe that we are the owners of the grace [of God], rather than its ministers. Grace is not for sale, it is free—it is grace.

And, while speaking about being ministers of [God's] grace, I ask each and every one of you, as members of this current of grace of the Charismatic Renewal, to organize Seminars of Life in the Spirit in your parishes, seminaries, schools, and neighbourhoods in order to share the Baptism in the Spirit, even in catechesis, so that the Holy Spirit could bring about that personal encounter with Jesus Christ, which changes our lives. And I am speaking from experience. When I first met the Charismatic movement, this current of grace, I was a young priest. I would get angry, very angry...



I thought that all of them were crazy. And once, in a sermon, while speaking about the Holy Spirit, I said that there were some Christians who change the Holy Spirit into a “Samba school”. After some years had passed, I realized how mistaken I was. It is a grace, a grace...

And please allow lay people to work in peace. Avoid clericalism, which is a sin, a sinful attitude that diminishes the Church's freedom. How many times I have parish priests come to me to tell me, “In my parish there is a lay man who is wonderful, he does this and that, he is a good organizer, and he has a gift for speaking to people, and so on... Should we make him a deacon?” Clericalism! And clericalism is a sinful, complicit attitude. It takes two to tango, right? It is complicit because the priests like clericalism, and laymen want it, because it is much more comfortable. Be careful with this sin, with this complicit clericalism.

OK. I brought you... I do not know if they sent them... In the various languages you speak—I am referring to the languages you speak, not to the gift of tongues, with which you will pray during the Mass—the “Joy of the Gospel” and the “Bull for the year of Mercy”. You can pick them up later. God help you.

Thank you for enduring me during this hour, and for sharing this. I ask you to please, pray for me, because I need God's mercy, because I want to love Jesus, I want to love more each day—but I am a sinner. So please, pray for me. Thank you. 🙏