



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Plaza de la Revolución José Martí, Havana

Wednesday, 28 March 2012

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Blessed are you, Lord God..., and blessed is your holy and glorious name” (*Dan 3:52*). This hymn of blessing from the Book of Daniel resounds today in our liturgy, inviting us repeatedly to bless and thank God. We are a part of that great chorus which praises the Lord without ceasing. We join in this concert of thanksgiving, and we offer our joyful and confident voice, which seeks to solidify the journey of faith with love and truth.

“Blessed be God” who gathers us in this historic square so that we may more profoundly enter into his life. I feel great joy in being here with you today to celebrate Holy Mass during this Jubilee Year devoted to Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre.

I greet with cordial affection Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, Archbishop of Havana, and I thank him for the kind words which he has addressed to me on your behalf. I extend warm greetings to the Cardinals and to my brother Bishops in Cuba and from other countries who wished to be in this solemn celebration. I also greet the priests, seminarians, men and women religious, and all the lay faithful gathered here, as well as the civil authorities who join us.

In today's first reading, the three young men persecuted by the Babylonian king preferred to face death by fire rather than betray their conscience and their faith. They experienced the strength to "give thanks, glorify and praise God" in the conviction that the Lord of the universe and of history would not abandon them to death and annihilation. Truly, God never abandons his children, he never forgets them. He is above us and is able to save us by his power. At the same time, he is near to his people, and through his Son Jesus Christ he has wished to make his dwelling place among us in.

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:31). In this text from today's Gospel, Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God the Father, the Saviour, the one who alone can show us the truth and give us genuine freedom. His teaching provokes resistance and disquiet among his hearers, and he accuses them of looking for reasons to kill him, alluding to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross, already imminent. Even so, he exhorts them to believe, to keep his word, so as to know the truth which redeems and justifies.

The truth is a desire of the human person, the search for which always supposes the exercise of authentic freedom. Many, without a doubt, would prefer to take the easy way out, trying to avoid this task. Some, like Pontius Pilate, ironically question the possibility of even knowing what truth is (cf. *Jn* 18:38), claiming is incapable of knowing it or denying that there exists a truth valid for all. This attitude, as in the case of scepticism and relativism, changes hearts, making them cold, wavering, distant from others and closed. There are too many who, like the Roman governor, wash their hands and let the water of history drain away without taking a stand.

On the other hand, there are those who wrongly interpret this search for the truth, leading them to irrationality and fanaticism; they close themselves up in "their truth", and try to impose it on others. These are like the blind scribes who, upon seeing Jesus beaten and bloody, cry out furiously, "Crucify him!" (cf. *Jn* 19:6). Anyone who acts irrationally cannot become a disciple of Jesus. Faith and reason are necessary and complementary in the pursuit of truth. God created man with an innate vocation to the truth and he gave him reason for this purpose. Certainly, it is not irrationality but rather the yearning for truth which the Christian faith promotes. Each man and woman has to seek the truth and to choose it when he or she finds it, even at the risk of embracing sacrifices.

Furthermore, the truth which stands above humanity is an unavoidable condition for attaining freedom, since in it we discover the foundation of an ethics on which all can converge and which contains clear and precise indications concerning life and death, duties and rights, marriage, family and society, in short, regarding the inviolable dignity of the human person. This ethical patrimony can bring together different cultures, peoples and religions, authorities and citizens, citizens among themselves, and believers in Christ and non-believers.

Christianity, in highlighting those values which sustain ethics, does not impose, but rather

proposes Christ's invitation to know the truth which sets us free. The believer is called to offer that truth to his contemporaries, as did the Lord, even before the ominous shadow of rejection and the Cross. The personal encounter with the one who is Truth in person compels us to share this treasure with others, especially by our witness.

Dear friends, do not hesitate to follow Jesus Christ. In him we find the truth about God and about mankind. He helps us to overcome our selfishness, to rise above our vain struggles and to conquer all that oppresses us. The one who does evil, who sins, becomes its slave and will never attain freedom (cf. *Jn* 8:34). Only by renouncing hatred and our hard and blind hearts will we be free and a new life will well up in us.

Convinced that it is Christ who is the true measure of man, and knowing that in him we find the strength needed to face every trial, I wish to proclaim openly that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. In him everyone will find complete freedom, the light to understand reality most deeply and to transform it by the renewing power of love.

The Church lives to make others sharers in the one thing she possesses, which is none other than Christ, our hope of glory (cf. *Col* 1:27). To carry out this duty, she must count on basic religious freedom, which consists in her being able to proclaim and to celebrate her faith also in public, bringing to others the message of love, reconciliation and peace which Jesus brought to the world. It must be said with joy that in Cuba steps have been taken to enable the Church to carry out her essential mission of expressing her faith openly and publicly. Nonetheless, this must continue forwards, and I wish to encourage the country's Government authorities to strengthen what has already been achieved and advance along this path of genuine service to the true good of Cuban society as a whole.

The right to freedom of religion, both in its private and in its public dimension, manifests the unity of the human person, who is at once a citizen and a believer. It also legitimizes the fact that believers have a contribution to make to the building up of society. Strengthening religious freedom consolidates social bonds, nourishes the hope of a better world, creates favourable conditions for peace and harmonious development, while at the same time establishing solid foundations for securing the rights of future generations.

When the Church upholds this human right, she is not claiming any special privileges for herself. She wishes only to be faithful to the command of her divine founder, conscious that, where Christ is present, we become more human and our humanity becomes authentic. This is why the Church seeks to give witness by her preaching and teaching, both in catechesis and in the schools and universities. It is greatly to be hoped that the moment will soon arrive when, here too, the Church can bring to the fields of knowledge the benefits of the mission which the Lord entrusted to her and which she can never neglect.

A shining example of this commitment is found in the outstanding priest Félix Varela, teacher and educator, an illustrious son of this city of Havana, who has taken his place in Cuban history as the first one who taught his people how to think. Father Varela offers us a path to a true transformation of society: to form virtuous men and women in order to forge a worthy and free nation, for this transformation depends on the spiritual, in as much as “there is no authentic fatherland without virtue” (*Letters to Elpidio*, Letter 6, Madrid 1836, 220). Cuba and the world need change, but this will occur only if each one is in a position to seek the truth and chooses the way of love, sowing reconciliation and fraternity.

Invoking the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, let us ask that each time we participate in the Eucharist we will also become witnesses to that charity which responds to evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:51), offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to the one who lovingly gave himself up for our sake. Let us walk in the light of Christ who alone can destroy the darkness of error. And let us beg him that, with the courage and strength of the saints, we may be able, without fear or rancour but freely, generously and consistently, to respond to God. Amen.

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