



# The Holy See

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## EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

### **HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS**

*Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls*

*Third Sunday of Easter, 14 April 2013*

**[Multimedia]**

**Photo Gallery**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

It is a joy for me to celebrate Mass with you in this Basilica. I greet the Archpriest, Cardinal James Harvey, and I thank him for the words that he has addressed to me. Along with him, I greet and thank the various institutions that form part of this Basilica, and all of you. We are at the tomb of Saint Paul, a great yet humble Apostle of the Lord, who proclaimed him by word, bore witness to him by martyrdom and worshipped him with all his heart. These are the three key ideas on which I would like to reflect in the light of the word of God that we have heard: proclamation, witness, worship.

1. In the First Reading, what strikes us is the strength of Peter and the other Apostles. In response to the order to be silent, no longer to teach in the name of Jesus, no longer to proclaim his message, they respond clearly: "We must obey God, rather than men". And they remain undeterred even when flogged, ill-treated and imprisoned. Peter and the Apostles proclaim courageously, fearlessly, what they have received: the Gospel of Jesus. And we? Are we capable of bringing the word of God into the environment in which we live? Do we know how to speak of Christ, of what he represents for us, in our families, among the people who form part of our daily lives? Faith is born from listening, and is strengthened by proclamation.

2. But let us take a further step: the proclamation made by Peter and the Apostles does not merely consist of words: fidelity to Christ affects their whole lives, which are changed, given a new direction, and it is through their lives that they bear witness to the faith and to the proclamation of

Christ. In today's Gospel, Jesus asks Peter three times to feed his flock, to feed it with his love, and he prophesies to him: "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go" (Jn 21:18). These words are addressed first and foremost to those of us who are pastors: we cannot feed God's flock unless we let ourselves be carried by God's will even where we would rather not go, unless we are prepared to bear witness to Christ with the gift of ourselves, unreservedly, not in a calculating way, sometimes even at the cost of our lives. But this also applies to everyone: we all have to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel. We should all ask ourselves: How do I bear witness to Christ through my faith? Do I have the courage of Peter and the other Apostles, to think, to choose and to live as a Christian, obedient to God? To be sure, the testimony of faith comes in very many forms, just as in a great fresco, there is a variety of colours and shades; yet they are all important, even those which do not stand out. In God's great plan, every detail is important, even yours, even my humble little witness, even the hidden witness of those who live their faith with simplicity in everyday family relationships, work relationships, friendships. There are the saints of every day, the "hidden" saints, a sort of "middle class of holiness", as a French author said, that "middle class of holiness" to which we can all belong. But in different parts of the world, there are also those who suffer, like Peter and the Apostles, on account of the Gospel; there are those who give their lives in order to remain faithful to Christ by means of a witness marked by the shedding of their blood. Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God! I am thinking now of some advice that Saint Francis of Assisi gave his brothers: preach the Gospel and, if necessary, use words. Preaching with your life, with your witness. Inconsistency on the part of pastors and the faithful between what they say and what they do, between word and manner of life, is undermining the Church's credibility.

3. But all this is possible only if we recognize Jesus Christ, because it is he who has called us, he who has invited us to travel his path, he who has chosen us. Proclamation and witness are only possible if we are close to him, just as Peter, John and the other disciples in today's Gospel passage were gathered around the Risen Jesus; there is a daily closeness to him: they know very well who he is, they know him. The Evangelist stresses the fact that "no one dared ask him: 'Who are you?' – they knew it was the Lord" (Jn 21:12). And this is important for us: living an intense relationship with Jesus, an intimacy of dialogue and of life, in such a way as to recognize him as "the Lord". Worshipping him! The passage that we heard from the Book of Revelation speaks to us of worship: the myriads of angels, all creatures, the living beings, the elders, prostrate themselves before the Throne of God and of the Lamb that was slain, namely Christ, to whom be praise, honour and glory (cf. Rev 5:11-14). I would like all of us to ask ourselves this question: You, I, do we worship the Lord? Do we turn to God only to ask him for things, to thank him, or do we also turn to him to worship him? What does it mean, then, to worship God? It means learning to be with him, it means that we stop trying to dialogue with him, and it means sensing that his presence is the most true, the most good, the most important thing of all. All of us, in our own lives, consciously and perhaps sometimes unconsciously, have a very clear order of priority concerning

the things we consider important. Worshipping the Lord means giving him the place that he must have; worshipping the Lord means stating, believing – not only by our words – that he alone truly guides our lives; worshipping the Lord means that we are convinced before him that he is the only God, the God of our lives, the God of our history.

This has a consequence in our lives: we have to empty ourselves of the many small or great idols that we have and in which we take refuge, on which we often seek to base our security. They are idols that we sometimes keep well hidden; they can be ambition, careerism, a taste for success, placing ourselves at the centre, the tendency to dominate others, the claim to be the sole masters of our lives, some sins to which we are bound, and many others. This evening I would like a question to resound in the heart of each one of you, and I would like you to answer it honestly: Have I considered which idol lies hidden in my life that prevents me from worshipping the Lord? Worshipping is stripping ourselves of our idols, even the most hidden ones, and choosing the Lord as the centre, as the highway of our lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, each day the Lord calls us to follow him with courage and fidelity; he has made us the great gift of choosing us as his disciples; he invites us to proclaim him with joy as the Risen one, but he asks us to do so by word and by the witness of our lives, in daily life. The Lord is the only God of our lives, and he invites us to strip ourselves of our many idols and to worship him alone. To proclaim, to witness, to adore. May the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Paul help us on this journey and intercede for us. Amen.