



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND CELEBRATION OF FIRST VESPERS OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Wednesday, 31 December 2014

Today the Word of God introduces us in a special way, to the meaning of time, to understand that time is not a reality extrinsic to God, simply because He chose to reveal Himself and to save us in history. The meaning of time, temporality, is the atmosphere of God's epiphany, namely, of the manifestation of God's mystery and of his concrete love. In fact, time is God's messenger, as St Peter Faber said. Today's liturgy reminds us of the phrase of the Apostle John: Children, it is the last hour (1 Jn 2:18), and that of St Paul who speaks of "when the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4). Therefore, the present day manifests to us how time was — so to speak — "touched" by Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, and received from Him new and surprising meanings: it became the "salvific time", namely, the definitive time of salvation and grace.

And all this induces us to think of the end of the journey of life, the end of our journey. There was a beginning and there will be an end, "a time to be born, and a time to die" (Eccles 3:2). With this truth, so simple and fundamental and so neglected and forgotten, Holy Mother Church teaches us to end the year and also our day with an examination of conscience, through which we review what has happened; we thank the Lord for every good we have received and have been able to do and, at the same time, we think again of our failings and our sins — to give thanks and to ask for forgiveness.

It is what we also do today at the end of the year. We praise the Lord with the *Te Deum* hymn and at the same time we ask Him for forgiveness. The attitude of thanksgiving disposes us to humility, to recognize and receive the Lord's gifts.

In the Reading of these First Vespers, the Apostle Paul recapitulates the fundamental motive for our rendering thanks to God: He has made us his children, He has adopted us as his children. This unmerited gift fills us with a gratitude brimming with astonishment! Someone might say: "But are we not already his children, by the very fact of being men?". We certainly are, because God is the Father of every person who comes into the world. But without forgetting that we were distanced from Him because of original sin, which separated us from our Father: our filial relationship was profoundly wounded. Therefore, God sent his Son to deliver us at the cost of His blood. And if there is a deliverance, it is because there is slavery. We were children, but we became slaves, following the voice of the Evil One. No one else delivers us from that effective slavery except Jesus, who assumed our flesh from the Virgin Mary and died on the Cross to free us from the slavery of sin and to restore us to our forfeit filial condition.

Today's liturgy also reminds us that in the beginning (before time) was the Word and the Word was made man and because of this, St Irenaeus affirms: "This is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God" (*Adversus Haereses*, 3, 19, 1:PG7/1, 939; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 460).

Contemporaneously, the very gift for which we give thanks is also a reason for an examination of conscience, for a revision of our personal and communal life, to ask ourselves: what is our lifestyle? Do we live as children or as slaves? Do we live as people baptized in Christ, anointed by the Spirit, delivered and free? Or do we live according to the corrupt, worldly logic, doing what the devil makes us believe is in our interests? In our existential journey there is always a tendency to resist liberation; we are afraid of freedom and, paradoxically and somewhat unwittingly, we prefer slavery. Freedom frightens us because it causes us to confront time and to face our responsibility to live it well. Instead, slavery reduces time to a "moment" and thus we feel more secure, that is, it makes us live moments disconnected from their past and from our future. In other words, slavery impedes us from truly and fully living the present, because it empties it of the past and closes it to the future, to eternity. Slavery makes us believe that we cannot dream, fly, hope.

A few days ago a great Italian artist said that it was easier for the Lord to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the heart of the Israelites. "Yes". They were "physically" freed from slavery, but during the wandering in the desert, with the various difficulties and the hunger, they began to feel nostalgia for Egypt and they remembered when they "ate the onions, and the garlic" (cf. Num 11:5); they forgot, however, that they ate them at the table of slavery. Nostalgia for slavery is nestled in our heart, because it is seemingly more reassuring than freedom, which is far more risky. How we like being captivated by lots of fireworks, beautiful at first glance but which in reality last but a few seconds! This is the reign, this is the charm of the moment!

For us Christians, the quality of our actions, of our life, of our presence in the city, of our service to the common good, of our participation in public and ecclesial institutions, also depends upon this

examination of conscience.

For this reason, and being the Bishop of Rome, I would like to reflect on our life in Rome, which is a great gift, because it means living in the Eternal City; for a Christian, especially, it means being part of the Church founded on the testimony and the martyrdom of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Therefore, we also thank the Lord for this. At the same time, however, it is a great responsibility. And Jesus said: “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required” (Lk 12:48). Thus, let us ask ourselves: in this city, in this Ecclesial Community, are we free or are we slaves, are we salt and light? Are we leaven? Or are we listless, insipid, hostile, disheartened, insignificant and weary?

Undoubtedly the discovery of grave corruption, which has recently emerged, require a serious and conscious conversion of hearts for a spiritual and moral rebirth, as well as for a renewed commitment to build a more just and solidary city, where the poor, the weak and the marginalized are at the centre of our concerns and daily actions. A great and daily attitude of Christian freedom is necessary in order to have the courage to proclaim, in our city, that it is necessary to protect the poor, and not to protect ourselves from the poor, that we must serve the weak and not take advantage of them!

The teaching of a simple Roman deacon can help us. When St Lawrence was asked to bring and display the treasures of the Church, he simply brought a few poor people. In a city, when the poor and the weak are cared for, aided and helped to play their part in society, they reveal themselves to be the treasure of the Church and a treasure in the society. Instead, when a society ignores the poor, persecutes them, criminalizes them, and constrains them “to react as a *mafia*”, that society becomes impoverished to the point of misery, it loses its freedom and prefers “*the garlic and the onions*” of slavery, of slavery to its selfishness, of slavery to its pusillanimity; that society ceases to be Christian.

Dear brothers and sisters, to conclude the year is to reaffirm that a “last hour” exists and that the “fullness of time” exists. In concluding this year, in giving thanks and in asking for forgiveness, it will be good for us to ask for the grace to be able to walk in freedom, to thus be able to repair all the harm done and to protect ourselves against the nostalgia of slavery, to protect ourselves from feeling “*nostalgia*” for slavery.

May the Holy Virgin, the Holy Mother of God, who was at the very heart of the Temple of God, when the Word — who was in the beginning — made Himself one with us in time; may She who gave the Saviour to the world, help us to receive Him with an open heart, in order that we may truly be and live freely, as children of God.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana