



The Holy See

RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE CATECHUMENATE AND MEETING WITH CATECHUMENS AT THE CLOSING OF THE YEAR OF FAITH

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 23 November 2013

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Dear Catechumens,

This concluding moment of the Year of Faith sees you gathered here, with your catechists and family members, also representing many other men and women around the world who are in your same walk of faith. Spiritually, we are all connected at this moment. You come from many different countries, from different cultural traditions and experiences. Yet this evening we feel we have so many things in common among us. We especially have one: the desire for God. This desire is evoked by the words of the Psalmist: “As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps 42 [41]: 1-2). It is so important to keep this desire alive, this longing to behold the Lord and to experience him, to experience his love, to experience his mercy! If one ceases to thirst for the living God, faith is in danger of becoming a habit, it risks being extinguished, like a fire that is not fed. It risks becoming “rancid”, meaningless.

The Gospel account (cf. Jn 1:35-42) showed us John the Baptist who points out Jesus as the Lamb of God to his disciples. Two of them follow the Master, and then, in turn, become “mediators” who enable others to encounter the Lord, to know him and to follow him. There are three moments in this narrative that recall the experience of the catechumenate. First, there is the moment of *listening*. The two disciples listened to the witness of the Baptist. You too, dear

Catechumens, have listened to those who have spoken to you about Jesus and suggested that you follow him by becoming his disciples through Baptism. Amid the din of many voices that echo around you and within you, you have listened and accepted the voice that points to Jesus as the One who can give full meaning to our life.

The second moment is the *encounter*. The two disciples encounter the Teacher and stay with him. After having encountered him, immediately they notice something new in their hearts: the need to transmit their joy to others, that they too may meet him. Andrew, in fact, meets his brother Simon and leads him to Jesus. What good it does us to meditate on this scene! It reminds us that God did not create us to be alone, closed in on ourselves, but in order to be able to encounter him and to open ourselves to encounter others. God first comes to each one of us; and this is marvellous! He comes to meet us! In the Bible God always appears as the one who takes the initiative in the encounter with man: it is he who seeks man, and usually he seeks him precisely while man is in the bitter and tragic moment of betraying God and fleeing from him. God does not wait in seeking him: he seeks him out immediately. He is a patient seeker, our Father! He goes before us and he waits for us always. He never tires of waiting for us, he is never far from us, but he has the patience to wait for the best moment to meet each one of us. And when the encounter happens, it is never rushed, because God wants to remain at length with us to sustain us, to console us, to give us his joy. God hastens to meet us, but he never rushes to leave us. He stays with us. As we long for him and desire him, so he too desires to be with us, that we may belong to him, we are his “belonging”, we are his creatures. He, too, we can say, thirsts for us, to meet us. Our God is thirsty for us. And this is God’s heart. It is so beautiful to hear this.

The last part of the narrative is *walking*. The two disciples walk toward Jesus and then walk a stretch of the road together with him. It is an important teaching for us all. Faith is a walk with Jesus. Remember this always: faith is walking with Jesus; and it is a walk that lasts a lifetime. At the end there shall be the definitive encounter. Certainly, at some moments on the journey we feel tired and confused. But the faith gives us the certainty of Jesus’ constant presence in every situation, even the most painful or difficult to understand. We are called to walk in order to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of the love of God, which reigns over us and permits us to live in serenity and hope.

Dear catechumens, today you begin the journey of the catechumenate. My wish for you is to follow it with joy, sure of the entire Church’s support, who is watching over you with great trust. May Mary, the perfect disciple, accompany you: it is beautiful to have her as our Mother in faith! I invite you to guard the enthusiasm of that first moment in which he opened your eyes to the light of faith; to remember, like the beloved disciple, the day, the hour in which for the first time you stayed with Jesus, felt his gaze upon you. Never forget the gaze of Jesus upon you; upon you, upon you... never forget his gaze! It is a gaze of love. And thus you shall be forever certain of the Lord’s faithful love. He is faithful. Be assured: he will never betray you!

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