



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to the KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

on the occasion of the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence"

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

"Bahrain National Stadium" (Awali)

Saturday, 5 November 2022

[Multimedia]

The prophet Isaiah says about the Messiah whom God will raise up, "His power shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace" (*Is* 9:6). This sounds like a contradiction in terms: on the world scene, we often notice that the more power is sought, the more peace is threatened. Instead, the prophet announces extraordinary news: the Messiah to come will indeed be powerful, not in the manner of a commander who wages war and rules over others, but as the "Prince of Peace" (v. 5), who reconciles people with God and with one another. His great power does not come from the force of violence, but from the weakness of love. And this is Christ's power: it is love. Jesus gives us that same power, the power to love, to love in his name, to love as he loved. How? Unconditionally. Not only when things are going well and we feel like loving, but *a/ways*. Not only towards our friends and neighbours, but towards everyone, including our enemies. Always and towards everyone.

To love always and to love everyone: Let us stop and reflect on this.

First, Jesus' words today (cf. *Mt* 5:38-48) invite us to *love always*, that is, to always remain in his love, to cultivate that love and to put it into practice, whatever the situation in which we live. Notice,

though, that Jesus' vision is completely practical; he does not say it will be easy, and he is not talking about sentimental or romantic love, as if in our human relationships there will not be any moments of conflict or grounds for hostility among peoples. Jesus is not idealistic, but realistic: he speaks explicitly of "evil" and "enemies" (vv. 38, 43). He knows that within our relationships there is a daily struggle between love and hatred. Within our hearts too, there is a daily clash between light and darkness: between our many resolutions and desires, and the sinful weakness that often takes over and drags us into doing evil. He also knows that, for all our generous efforts, we do not always receive the good we expect and indeed sometimes, incomprehensibly, we suffer evil. What is more, he suffers when he sees in our own day and in many parts of the world, ways of exercising power that feed on oppression and violence, seeking to expand their own space by restricting that of others, imposing their own domination and restricting basic freedoms, and in this way oppressing the weak. And so, Jesus says, conflict, oppression and enmity exist among us.

In light of all this, the important question to ask is: What are we to do in such situations? Jesus' answer is surprising, bold and daring. He tells his disciples to find the courage to risk something that seems sure to fail. He asks them to remain always, faithfully, in love, despite everything, even in the face of evil and our enemy. A purely human reaction would restrict us to seeking "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," but that would be to exact justice by using the same weapons of evil used on us. Jesus dares to propose something new, different, unthinkable, something that is *his own way*. "I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But, if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (v. 39). That is what the Lord asks of us: not to dream idealistically of a world of fraternity, but to choose, starting with ourselves, to practice universal fraternity, concretely and courageously, persevering in good even when evil is done to us, breaking the spiral of vengeance, disarming violence, demilitarizing the heart. The Apostle Paul echoes Jesus when he writes, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (*Rom 12:21*).

What Jesus asks us to do does not primarily concern the great problems of humanity, but the concrete situations of our daily lives: our relationships in the family and in the Christian community, in the workplace and in society. There will be cases of friction and moments of tension, there will be conflicts and opposing viewpoints, but those who follow the Prince of Peace must always strive for peace. And peace cannot be restored if a harsh word is answered with an even harsher one, if one slap leads to another. No, we need to "disarm," to shatter the chains of evil, to break the spiral of violence, and to put an end to resentment, complaints and self-pity. We need to keep loving, always. This is Jesus' way of giving glory to the God of heaven and building peace on earth. *Love always*.

Now we come to the second aspect: *to love everyone*. We can be committed to loving, but it is not enough if we restrict this commitment to the close circle of those who love us, who are our friends, who are like us or who are our family members. Again, what Jesus asks us to do is amazing because it transcends the boundaries of law and common sense. Loving our neighbor, those close to us, though reasonable, is exhausting enough. In general, this is what a community or a people

tries to do to preserve its internal peace. If people belong to the same family or nation, or have the same ideas or tastes and profess the same beliefs, it is normal for them to try to help one another and to love one another. Yet what happens if those who are far distant approach us, if foreigners, who are different or hold other beliefs, become our neighbours? This very land is a living image of coexistence in diversity, and indeed an image of our world, increasingly marked by the constant migration of peoples and by a pluralism of ideas, customs and traditions. It is important, then, to embrace Jesus' challenge: "If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (*Mt* 5:46). If we want to be children of the Father and build a world of brothers and sisters, the real challenge is to learn how to love everyone, even our enemies: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (vv. 43-44). Concretely, this means choosing not to have enemies, choosing to see in others not an obstacle to be overcome, but a brother or sister to be loved. To love our enemies is to make this earth a reflection of heaven; it is to draw down upon our world the eyes and heart of the Father who does not distinguish or discriminate, but "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (v. 45).

Brothers and sisters, the power of Jesus is love. Jesus gives us the power to love in this way, which for us seems superhuman. This ability, though, cannot be merely the result of our own efforts; it is primarily the fruit of God's grace. A grace that must be implored insistently: "Jesus, you who love me, teach me to love like you. Jesus, you who forgive me, teach me to forgive like you. Send your Spirit, the Spirit of love, upon me." Let us ask for this grace. So often we bring our requests before the Lord, but what is essential for us as Christians is to know how to love as Christ loves. His greatest gift is the ability to love, and that is what we receive when we make room for the Lord in prayer, when we welcome his presence in his transforming word and in the revolutionary humility of his broken Bread. Thus, slowly, the walls that harden our hearts tumble, and we find our joy in carrying out works of mercy towards everyone. Then we come to realize that happiness in life comes through the Beatitudes and consists in our becoming peacemakers (cf. *Mt* 5:9).

Dear brothers and sisters, today I thank you for your gentle and joyful witness to fraternity, for your being seeds of love and peace in this land. Such is the challenge that the Gospel presents every day to our Christian communities and to each of us. To you, to all who have come for this celebration from the four countries of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia – Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Gulf, and from elsewhere – I bring today the affection and closeness of the universal Church, which looks to you and embraces you, which loves you and encourages you. May the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Arabia, accompany you on your journey and preserve you constantly in love towards all.
