

"The Church is certainly a human and historical institution with all that it entails, yet her nature is not essentially political but spiritual: the Church is the People of God, the Holy People of God making its way to encounter Jesus Christ. Only from this perspective can a satisfactory account be given of the Church's life and activity." Pope Francis

The Church as field hospital

"I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars!

You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds... And you have to start from the ground up."

"The Church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you."

Pope Francis

"We cannot think of a Church without joy and the joy of the Church is this: announcing the name of Jesus. To say: 'He is the Lord', the Pope said. "My spouse is the Lord. It is God.' He saves us, He walks with us.' And that is the joy of the Church, who in this joy of a wife becomes a mother."

Pope Francis at morning Holy Mass 03 Dec 2013

"The image of the church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, and then there is that image from the Second Vatican Council's 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' (No. 12). Belonging to a people has a strong theological value. In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.

"The dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent. The church's pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently. Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus. We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel. The proposal of the Gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow.

"I say this also thinking about the preaching and content of our preaching. A beautiful homily, a genuine sermon must begin with the first proclamation, with the proclamation of salvation. There is nothing more solid, deep and sure than this proclamation. Then you have to do catechesis. Then you can draw even a moral consequence. But the proclamation of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives. Today sometimes it seems that the opposite order is prevailing. The homily is the touchstone to measure the pastor's proximity and ability to meet his people, because those who preach must recognize the heart of their community and must be able to see where the desire for God is lively and ardent. The message of the Gospel, therefore, is not to be reduced to some aspects that, although relevant, on their own do not show the heart of the message of Jesus Christ."

Pope: The Church Belongs to Everyone. Holy Father Francis says Church is not only for good people but a "feast of unity"

VATICAN CITY, November 05, 2013 (Zenit.org) - A Vatican Radio summary of Pope Francis' morning homily, Nov. 5:

At the heart of Christianity is an invitation to the Lord's feast. That was Pope Francis' message at Mass this morning at the Casa Santa Marta this morning. The Pope said that the Church is "not only for good people;" the invitation to be a part of it concerns everyone. And he added that, at the Lord's feast we must "participate fully" and with everyone; we can't pick and choose. Christians, he said, can't be content with simply being on the guest list - not participating fully is like not joining in.

The readings of the day, the Pope said, the identity of the Christian. He emphasized that "first of all, the Christian essence is an invitation: we only become Christians if we are invited." It is a "free invitation" from God to participate. You can't pay to get into the feast, he warned: "either you are invited or you can't come in." If "in our conscience," he said, "we don't have this certainty of being invited" then "we haven't understood what a Christian is".

"A Christian is one who is invited. Invited to what? To a shop? To take a walk? The Lord wants to tell us something more: You are invited to join in the feast, to the joy of being saved, to the joy of being redeemed, to the joy of sharing life with Christ. This is a joy! You are called to a party! A feast is a gathering of people who talk, laugh, celebrate, are happy together. I have never seen anyone party on their own. That would be boring, no? Opening the bottle of wine . . . That's not a feast, it's something else. You have to party with others, with the family, with friends, with those who've been invited, as I was invited. Being Christian means belonging, belonging to this body, to the people that have been invited to the feast: this is Christian belonging."

Turning to the Letter to the Romans, the Pope then affirmed that this feast is a "feast of unity." He underlined the fact that all are invited, "the good and the bad." And the first to be invited are the marginalized:

"The Church is not the Church only for good people. Do we want to describe who belongs to the Church, to this feast? The sinners. All of us sinners are invited. At this point

there is a community that has diverse gifts: one has the gift of prophecy, another of ministry, who teaching. . . We all have qualities and strengths. But each of us brings to the feast a common gift. Each of us is called to participate fully in the feast. Christian existence cannot be understood without this participation. 'I go to the feast, but I don't go beyond the antechamber, because I want to be only with the three or four people that I familiar with. . .' You can't do this in the Church! You either participate fully or you remain outside. You can't pick and choose: the Church is for everyone, beginning with those I've already mentioned, the most marginalized. It is everyone's Church!"

Speaking about the parable in which Jesus said some who were invited began to make excuses, Pope Francis said: "They don't accept the invitation! They say 'yes,' but their actions say 'no.'" These people, he said, "are Christians who are content to be on the guest list: chosen Christians." But, he warned, this is not sufficient, because if you don't participate you are not a Christian. "You were on the list," he said, but this isn't enough for salvation! This is the Church: to enter into the Church is a grace; to enter into the Church is an invitation." And this right, he added, cannot be purchased. "To enter into the Church," he added, "is to become part of a community, the community of the Church. To enter into the Church is to participate in all the virtues, the qualities that the Lord has given us in our service of one for the other." Pope Francis continued, "To enter into the Church means to be responsible for those things that the Lord asks of us." Ultimately, he said, "to enter into the Church is to enter into this People of God, in its journey towards eternity." No one, he warned, is the protagonist of the Church: but we have ONE," who has done everything. God "is the protagonist!" We are his followers . . . and "he who does not follow Him is the one who excuses himself" and does not go to the feast:

The Lord is very generous. The Lord opens all doors. The Lord also understands those who say to Him, 'No, Lord, I don't want to go to you.' He understands and is waiting for them, because He is merciful. But the Lord does not like those who say 'yes' and do the opposite; who pretend to thank Him for all the good things; who have good manners, but go their own way and do not follow the way of the Lord: those who always excuse themselves, those who do not know joy, who don't experience the joy of belonging. Let us ask the Lord for this grace of understanding: how beautiful it is to be invited to the feast, how beautiful it is to take part in it and to share one's qualities, how beautiful it is to be with Him and how wrong it is to dither between 'yes' and 'no,' to say 'yes,' but to be satisfied merely with being a nominal Christian.

From the Dogmatic Constitution On The Church of the Second Vatican Council

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus and in which we acquire holiness through the grace of God, will reach its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when the time comes for the renewal of all things, and the whole world, which is intimately bound up with man and reaches its perfection through him, will, along with the human race, be perfectly restored in Christ.

Lifted above the earth, Christ drew all things to himself. Rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples, and through the Spirit established his Body, which is the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation. Seated at the right hand of the Father, he works unceasingly in the world, to draw men into the Church and through it to join them more closely to himself, nourishing them with his own body and blood, and so making them share in his life of glory.

Pope Francis: The Church Is a House of Joy, Not a Refuge for Sad People

Addresses Faithful on Gaudete Sunday During Angelus VATICAN CITY, December 16, 2013

Addressing the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis reminded the faithful that the Church is not a refuge for sad people but rather a house of joy.

Thousands gathered in St. Peter's Square despite the rainy weather in Rome to hear the Pope speak about the third Sunday of Advent, also known as "Gaudete" (Rejoice) Sunday.

The Holy Father said that the Gospel message is "an announcement of joy for the whole people.

"Those who are sad find joy in her, they find true joy in her," the Pope said. Referring to the first reading of the Sunday from the prophet Isaiah, Pope Francis told those present that God comes to encourage those who are fearful of heart, or rather, when our life becomes dry and arid.

"And when does our life become arid?" he asked. "This happens when it lacks the water of the Word of God and his Spirit of love. However, great are our limits and our dismay, we are not permitted to be downhearted and vacillating in the face of our infirmities."

"On the contrary, we are invited to get a grip and straighten our weak knees, to have courage and not be afraid because our God always shows us the greatness of his mercy."

Encouraging those who feel that they can't have a fresh start in life because of their sins, the Holy Father said that God awaits all with mercy and love, ready to forgive. This allows us to overcome sadness and gives us true joy in times of trial.

Christian joy, like hope, has its foundation in God's fidelity, in the certainty that he always keeps his promises," the Pope said. "The prophet Isaiah exhorts those who have lost their way and are in trouble to trust in the Lord's fidelity because his salvation will not delay in breaking into their life."

"Jesus Christ," he exclaimed, "is our joy! His faithful love is inexhaustible!" The Pope went on to say that when a Christian is sad, it means that they have distanced themselves from Jesus. The Holy Father stressed the importance of praying for those who are sad and make them "feel the warmth of the community."

Prior to reciting the Angelus, Pope Francis called on the faithful to look at the example of Mary during the Advent season, who obtains for all of us the joy of the Gospel.

"It is an intimate joy, made of wonder and tenderness," he concluded. "It is what a mother experiences when she looks at her newborn child, and feels that he is a gift of God, a miracle that she can only be grateful for!"

Following the Angelus, the Holy Father thanked the crowds for braving the weather and addressed the children of the families who came for the traditional blessing of the Bambinelli, the figurines of Christ for the crèche.

"Dear children, when you pray before your crèche, remember me too, as I will remember you. I thank you, and Merry Christmas!" he said. (J.A.E.)

Pope Francis: A Church That Lacks Prophecy Becomes Filled with Clericalism

Reflects on the Role of Prophets During Morning Mass VATICAN CITY, 12/16/2013

A Church that lacks prophecy leaves a void that is filled by clericalism and legalism. This was the heart of the Holy Father's homily today at Casa Santa Marta.

Describing the role of the prophet, Pope Francis told the faithful present that the prophet is one who carries within himself three moments: the promise of the past, contemplation of the present and courage to show the path towards the future.

"The Lord has always taken care of His people with the prophets, in difficult moments, in the moments in which the People were discouraged or destroyed, when there was no Temple, when Jerusalem was under the power of enemies, when the people asked within themselves: 'But Lord you promised this! And what is going on now?'" the Pope said.

It is in these moments of difficulty, the Pope stressed, that the words of the prophets are necessary, although many times they are rejected. Even Jesus recognized this when reminding the Pharisees that their ancestors killed the prophets for speaking the truth. When the people of God lack the life of the Lord.

Reflecting on the Gospel, where the Pharisees question Christ's authority in teaching, the Holy Father said that in doing so, they forgot the promises made by God in the past. Their hearts were fixed on legalism and authority.

"When there is no prophecy in the people of God, the void it leaves becomes occupied by clericalism. And it is this clericalism that Jesus asks: 'With what authority do you do this? With what authority?' And the memory of the promise and the hope of going forward becomes reduced to only the present: neither the past, nor a hopeful future. The present is legal. If it is legal it goes forward," the Pope said.

Concluding his homily, Pope Francis prayed that in these days leading to Christmas, that there may not be a lack of prophets.

"Let us not tire of moving forward! Let us not be closed in the legality that closes the doors! Lord, free your people from the spirit of clericalism and help them with the spirit of prophecy," he said.

