



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO CUBA, TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
(19-28 SEPTEMBER 2015)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Plaza de la Revolución, Holguín
Monday, 21 September 2015

[Multimedia]

We are celebrating the feast of the apostle and evangelist Saint Matthew. We are celebrating the story of a conversion. Matthew himself, in his Gospel, tell us what it was like, this encounter which changed his life. He shows us an “exchange of glances” capable of changing history.

On a day like any other, as Matthew, the tax collector, was seated at his table, Jesus passed by, saw him, came up to him and said: “Follow me”. Matthew got up and followed him.

Jesus looked at him. How strong was the love in that look of Jesus, which moved Matthew to do what he did! What power must have been in his eyes to make Matthew get up from his table! We know that Matthew was a publican: he collected taxes from the Jews to give to the Romans. Publicans were looked down upon and considered sinners; for that reason they lived apart and were despised by others. One could hardly eat, speak or pray with the likes of these. For the people, they were traitors: they extorted from their own to give to others. Publicans belonged to this social class.

Jesus stopped; he did not quickly turn away. He looked at Matthew calmly, peacefully. He looked at him with eyes of mercy; he looked at him as no one had ever looked at him before. And that look unlocked Matthew’s heart; it set him free, it healed him, it gave him hope, a new life, as it did to Zacchaeus, to Bartimaeus, to Mary Magdalen, to Peter, and to each of us. Even if we dare not

raise our eyes to the Lord, he always looks at us first. This is our story, and it is like that of so many others. Each of us can say: "I, too, am a sinner, whom Jesus has looked upon". I ask you today, in your homes or at church, when you are alone and at peace, to take a moment to recall with gratitude and happiness those situations, that moment, when the merciful gaze of God was felt in our lives.

Jesus' love goes before us, his look anticipates our needs. He can see beyond appearances, beyond sin, beyond failures and unworthiness. He sees beyond our rank in society. He sees beyond all of this. He sees our dignity as sons and daughters, a dignity at times sullied by sin, but one which endures in the depth of our soul. It is our dignity as sons and daughters. He came precisely to seek out all those who feel unworthy of God, unworthy of others. Let us allow Jesus to look at us. Let us allow his gaze to run over our streets. Let us allow that look to become our joy, our hope, our happiness in life.

After the Lord looked upon him with mercy, he said to Matthew: "Follow me." Matthew got up and followed him. After the look, a word. After love, the mission. Matthew is no longer the same; he is changed inside. The encounter with Jesus and his loving mercy transformed him. His table, his money, his exclusion, were all left behind. Before, he had sat waiting to collect his taxes, to take from others; now, with Jesus he must get up and give, give himself to others. Jesus looks at him and Matthew encounters the joy of service. For Matthew and for all who have felt the gaze of Jesus, other people are no longer to be "lived off", used and abused. The gaze of Jesus gives rise to missionary activity, service, self-giving. Other people are those whom Jesus serves. His love heals our short-sightedness and pushes us to look beyond, not to be satisfied with appearances or with what is politically correct.

Jesus goes before us, he precedes us; he opens the way and invites us to follow him. He invites us slowly to overcome our preconceptions and our reluctance to think that others, much less ourselves, can change. He challenges us daily with a question: "Do you believe? Do you believe it is possible that a tax collector can become a servant? Do you believe it is possible that a traitor can become a friend? Do you believe it is possible that the son of a carpenter can be the Son of God?" His gaze transforms our way of seeing things, his heart transforms our hearts. God is a Father who seeks the salvation of each of his sons and daughters.

Let us gaze upon the Lord in prayer, in the Eucharist, in Confession, in our brothers and sisters, especially those who feel excluded or abandoned. May we learn to see them as Jesus sees us. Let us share his tenderness and mercy with the sick, prisoners, the elderly and families in difficulty. Again and again we are called to learn from Jesus, who always sees what is most authentic in every person, which is the image of his Father.

I know the efforts and the sacrifices being made by the Church in Cuba to bring Christ's word and presence to all, even in the most remote areas. Here I would mention especially the "mission

houses” which, given the shortage of churches and priests, provide for many people a place for prayer, for listening to the word of God, for catechesis and for community life. They are small signs of God’s presence in our neighborhoods and a daily aid in our effort to respond to the plea of the apostle Paul: “I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (cf. *Eph* 4:1-3).

I now turn my eyes to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, whom Cuba embraced and to whom it opened its doors forever. I ask her to look with maternal love on all her children in this noble country. May her “eyes of mercy” ever keep watch over each of you, your homes, your families, and all those who feel that they have no place. In her love, may she protect us all as she once cared for Jesus. And may she teach us to look upon others in the same way that Jesus looked upon each one of us.