



The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE EARTHQUAKE-AFFECTED AREAS
OF THE DIOCESE OF CAMERINO-SAN SEVERINO MARCHE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Camerino

Sunday, 16 June 2019

[Multimedia]

“What is man that thou art mindful of him” we prayed during the Psalm (8:4). These words came to mind as I was thinking of you. Before what you have seen and suffered, before the crumbled houses and buildings reduced to ruins, this question comes to mind: *What is man?* What is he if what he raises can crumble down in an instant? What is he if his hope can crumble to dust? *What is man?* The answer seems to lie in the continuation of the sentence: what is man that thou art *mindful of him?* God remembers us just as we are with all our frailties. In the uncertainty that we feel within and on the outside, the Lord gives us one certainty: He remembers us. He is *re-mindful* of us, that is, he returns to us with his heart because he cares for us. And while here on earth many things are quickly forgotten, God does not leave us in oblivion. No one is despicable in his eyes. Each of us has an infinite value for him: we are small beneath the sky and powerless when the earth trembles but to God we are more precious than any thing else.

Memory is a keyword for life. Let us ask for the grace to remember each day that we are not forgotten by God, that we are his beloved, unique and irreplaceable children. Remembering this gives us the strength not to surrender before life’s setbacks. Let us remember our worth when we are faced with the temptation to feel sad and to continue dredging up the worst, which seems to be never-ending. Bad memories also appear when we are not thinking of them. But they dole out pain: they leave behind only melancholy and nostalgia. But how difficult it is to free oneself from bad memories! That adage — according to which it was easier for God to take Israel out of Egypt than Egypt out of of Israel’s heart — has merit.

In order to free the heart from a past that keeps returning, from negative memories that imprison, from paralyzing regrets, we need someone to help us carry the burden we have within. Indeed, today Jesus says there are “many things that we cannot bear” (cf. Jn 16:12). And what does he do in the face of our weakness? He does not remove our burdens as we would like, we who are always seeking quick and superficial solutions; no, the Lord gives us the Holy Spirit. We need him because he is the Comforter, that is, the one who does not leave us on our own under life’s burdens. He is the One who transforms our enslaved memory into free memory, past wounds into *memories of salvation*. He accomplishes in us what he did through Jesus: his wounds — those terrible lesions hollowed out by evil — by the power of the Holy Spirit have become channels of mercy, luminous wounds in which God’s love shines, a love that is uplifting, that enables us to rise again. This is what the Holy Spirit does when we invite him into our wounds. He anoints the bad memories with the balm of hope because the Holy Spirit is *the builder of hope*.

Hope. What hope is this? It is not a passing hope. Earthly hopes are fleeting. They always have an expiration date. They are made with earthly ingredients which sooner or later spoil. The hope of the Holy Spirit has a long shelf life. It does not expire because it is based on God’s fidelity. The Holy Spirit’s hope is not even optimism. It is born deeper; deep in our heart it rekindles the certainty that we are precious because we are loved. It instils the trust that we are not alone. It is a hope that leaves peace and joy within, irrespective of what happens outside. It is a hope that has strong roots that none of life’s storms can uproot. It is a hope, Saint Paul says today, that “does not disappoint us” (Rm 5:5) — hope does not disappoint! —, that gives us the strength to bear every trial (cf. Rm 5:2-3). When we are suffering or wounded — and you know well what it means to be suffering, wounded — we are led to ‘build a nest’ around our sorrows and our fears. But the Spirit releases us from our nests, helps us take flight, reveals to us the marvellous destiny for which we are born. The Spirit nurtures us with living hope. Let us invite him. Let us ask him to come into us and be close to us. Come, Spirit Comforter! Come to give us some light, to give us the meaning of this tragedy, to give us the hope that does not disappoint. Come, Holy Spirit!

Closeness is the third and final word that I would like to share with you. Today we are celebrating the Most Holy Trinity. The Trinity is not a theological riddle, but rather the splendid mystery of God’s closeness. The Trinity tells us that we do not have a solitary God above in heaven, distant and indifferent; no, he is *Father* who gave us his *Son*, who became man like us, and who, in order to be even closer to us, to help us bear the burdens of life, sends us his very *Spirit*. He, who is Spirit, enters our spirit and thus comforts us from within, bringing God’s tenderness into our heart. With God the burdens of life do not rest on our shoulders: the Spirit, whom we name each time we make the sign of the Cross precisely as we touch our shoulders, comes to give us strength, to encourage us, to bear the burdens. Indeed, he is an expert in resuscitation, in raising up again, in rebuilding. It takes more strength to repair than to build, to recommence than to start from scratch, to reconcile than to just get along. This is the strength that God gives us. Therefore those who draw near to God do not lose heart, but go forward: they recommence, try again, rebuild. They also suffer, but manage to start over, to try again, to rebuild.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have come here today simply to be close to you; I am here with you to pray to the God *who is mindful of us*, so that no one forget those who are in difficulty. I pray to the *God of hope* that what is unstable on earth not cause our inner certainty to waver. I pray to the *God-with-us*, that he inspire concrete gestures of closeness. Nearly three years have passed and the risk is that, after the initial emotional media response, attention may subside and promises be forgotten, increasing the frustration of those who see the territory becoming increasingly less populated. But the Lord urges us to remember, to repair, to rebuild, and to do so together, while never forgetting those who are suffering.

What is man that thou art mindful of him? God who remembers us, God who heals our wounded memories, anointing them with hope, God who is close to us so as to raise us up again from within: may this God help us to be builders of good, comforters of hearts. Each one can do some good, without expecting others to begin. *'I will begin; I will begin; I will begin'*: each one must say this. Each one can comfort someone, without expecting his troubles to be resolved. Also by carrying my cross, I try to approach others to comfort them. *What is man?* He is your great dream, Lord, of whom you are always mindful. Man is your great dream, Lord, whom you always remember. It is not easy to understand it in these circumstances, Lord. Men and women forget about us; they do not remember this tragedy. But you, Lord, do not forget. Man is your great dream, Lord, of whom you are always mindful. Lord, enable us too to remember that we are in the world in order to give hope and closeness, because we are you children: "God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3).