



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND SOUTH SUDAN
(ECUMENICAL PEACE PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH SUDAN)

[31 January - 5 February 2023]

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

“Ndolo” Airport (Kinshasa)
Wednesday, 1st February 2023

[Multimedia]

Bandeko, bobóto [Brothers and sisters, peace be with you]

R/ Bondeko [Fraternity]

Bondéko [Fraternity]

R/Esengo [Joy]

Esengo, joy: to see and encounter you is a great joy. I have very much looked forward to this moment; we had to wait for a new year! Thank you for being here!

The Gospel has just told us that the joy of the disciples on the evening of Easter was also great, and that this joy exploded “when they saw the Lord” (*Jn* 20:20). In this atmosphere of joy and wonder, the Risen Jesus speaks to them. What does he tell them? Above all, four simple words: “*Peace be with you!*” (v. 19). A greeting, but more than a greeting: it is a gift. Because the peace, the peace proclaimed by the angels on the night of his birth in Bethlehem (cf. *Lk* 2:14), the peace

Jesus promised to leave his disciples (cf. *Jn 14:27*), is now, for the first time, solemnly given to them. The peace of Jesus, which is also given to us in every Mass, is an Easter peace: it comes from the resurrection, because the Lord first had to defeat our enemies, sin and death, and reconcile the world to the Father. He had to experience our solitude and abandonment, our hell, embracing and removing the distance that separates us from life and hope. Now, after removing the distance between heaven and earth, between God and man, Jesus gives his peace to his disciples.

Let us put ourselves in their place. That day they were completely mortified by the scandal of the cross, interiorly wounded from having fled and abandoned Jesus, dismayed by the way his life had ended and fearful that their lives would end in the same way. They were feeling guilty, frustrated, sorrowful and afraid... However, Jesus comes and proclaims peace, even as his disciples' hearts were downcast. He announces life, even as they felt surrounded by death. In other words, the peace of Jesus arrived at the very moment when, suddenly and to their surprise, everything seemed to be over for them, without even a glimmer of peace. That is what the Lord does: he surprises us; he takes us by the hand when we are falling; he lifts us up when we are hitting rock bottom. Brothers and sisters, with Jesus, evil never wins, evil never has the last word. "For he is our peace" (*Eph 2:14*), and his peace is always triumphant. Consequently, we who belong to Jesus must never yield to sorrow; we must not permit resignation and fatalism to take hold of us. Even though that atmosphere reigns all around us, it must not be so for us. In a world disheartened by violence and war, Christians must be like Jesus. As if to insist on the point, Jesus told the disciples once more: *Peace be with you!* (cf. *Jn 20:19, 21*). We are called to make our own the Lord's unexpected and prophetic message of peace and proclaim it before the world.

At the same time, we can ask ourselves: how can we safeguard and cultivate the peace of Jesus? He himself points to three *wellsprings of peace*, three sources from which we can draw as we continue to nurture peace. They are forgiveness, community and mission.

Let us look at the first source: *forgiveness*. Jesus says to his disciples: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them" (v. 23). Yet before giving the apostles the power to forgive, he forgives them, not with words but with an act, the first act of the Risen Lord. The Gospel tells us that, "he showed them his hands and his side" (v. 20). Jesus showed them his wounds. He showed them his wounds, because forgiveness is born from wounds. It is born when our wounds do not leave scars of hatred, but become the means by which we make room for others and accept their weaknesses. Our weakness becomes an opportunity, and forgiveness becomes the path to peace. This does not mean that we turn around and act as if nothing is changed; instead, we open our hearts in love to others. That is what Jesus does: faced with the sadness and shame of those who had denied him and fled, he shows his wounds and opens up the wellspring of mercy. He does not multiply words, but opens wide his wounded heart, in order to tell us that he is always wounded with love for us.

Brothers, sisters, when guilt and sadness overwhelm us, when things do not go well, we know where to look: to the wounds of Jesus, who is ever ready to forgive us with his infinite, wounded love. He knows your wounds; he knows the wounds of your country, your people, your land! They are wounds that ache, continually infected by hatred and violence, while the medicine of justice and the balm of hope never seem to arrive. My brother, my sister, Jesus suffers with you. He sees the wounds you carry within, and he desires to console and heal you; he offers you his wounded heart. To your heart, God repeats the words he spoke today through the prophet Isaiah: "I will heal them; I will lead them and repay them with comfort" (*Is 57:18*).

Together, we believe that Jesus always gives us the possibility of being forgiven and starting over, but also the strength to forgive ourselves, others and history! That is what Christ wants. He wants to anoint us with his forgiveness, to give us peace and the courage to forgive others in turn, the courage to grant others a great *amnesty of the heart*. What great good it does us to cleanse our hearts of anger and remorse, of every trace of resentment and hostility! Dear brothers and sisters, may today be a time of grace for you to accept and experience Jesus' forgiveness! May it be the right time for those of you who bear heavy burdens in your heart and long for them to be lifted so that you can breathe freely once again. And may it be a good time for all of you in this country who call yourselves Christians but engage in violence. The Lord is telling you: "Lay down your arms, embrace mercy". To all the wounded and oppressed of this people, he is saying: "Do not be afraid to bury your wounds in mine". Let us do this, brothers and sisters. Do not be afraid to take the crucifix from your neck and out of your pockets, to take it between your hands and hold it close to your heart, in order to share your wounds with the wounds of Jesus. Then, when you return home, take the crucifix from the wall and embrace it. Give Christ the chance to heal your heart, hand your past over to him, along with all your fears and troubles. What a beautiful thing it is to open the doors of your heart and your home to his peace! And why not write those words of his on your walls, wear them on your clothing, and put them as a sign on your houses: *Peace be with you!* Displaying these words will be a prophetic statement to your country, and a blessing of the Lord upon all whom you meet. *Peace be with you*: let us receive forgiveness from God and in turn forgive one another!

Let us look now at the second source of peace: *community*. The Risen Jesus does not speak just to one of his disciples; he appears to them as a group. Upon this, the first Christian community, he bestows his peace. There is no Christianity without community, just as there is no peace without fraternity. But as a community, where are we headed, where are we going to find peace? Let us look again at the disciples. Before Easter, they walked behind Jesus, but continued to think in human terms: they were hoping for a victorious Messiah who would vanquish his enemies, work wonders and miracles, and make them rich and famous. Yet those worldly desires left them empty-handed and robbed their community of peace, generating arguments and opposition (cf. *Lk 9:46; 22:24*). We face the same danger: to be with others, but to go our own way; in society, and even in the Church, we seek power, a career, our own ambitions... We go our own way instead of God's, and we end up like the disciples: behind locked doors, without hope, and filled with fear and

disappointment. Yet at Easter they once more find the path to peace, thanks to Jesus, who breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (*Jn 20:22*). Thanks to the Holy Spirit, they will no longer look at what divides them, but at what unites them. They will go out into the world no longer for themselves, but for others; not to gain attention, but to offer hope; not to earn approval, but to spend their lives joyfully for the Lord and for others.

Brothers and sisters, there is always the danger that we can follow the spirit of the world instead of the Spirit of Christ. How can we resist the lure of power and money and not give in to divisiveness, to the temptations of careerism that corrode the community, and to the false illusions of pleasure and witchcraft that make us become selfish and self-centred? Once more, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord shows us the way. He tells us: "I dwell... with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (*Is 57:15*). His way is to share with the poor: that is the best antidote against the temptations of divisiveness and worldliness. To have the courage to look to the poor and listen to them, because they are members of our community and not strangers to be kept far from our sight and our conscience. Let us open our hearts to others, instead of closing in upon our own problems or superficial concerns. Let us start from the poor and we will discover that we all share an interior poverty, that all of us need the Spirit of God to free us from the spirit of the world, and that humility is the grandeur and fraternity the true wealth of every Christian. Let us believe in community and, with God's help, build a Church free of the worldly spirit and full of the Holy Spirit, unconcerned with hoarding riches and filled with brotherly love!

Finally, we come to the third source of peace: *mission*. Jesus says to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (*Jn 20:21*). He sends us, even as the Father sent him. Yet how did the Father send him into the world? He sent him to serve and to give his life for humanity (cf. *Mk 10:45*), to show his mercy to each person (cf. *Lk 15*) and to seek out those who are far away (cf. *Mt 9:13*). In a word, the Father sent him for everyone: not just for the righteous, but for everyone. In this regard, the words of Isaiah resound once more: "Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord," (*Is 57:19*). First to the far, and then to the near: not only to "our own", but to all.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to be missionaries of peace, and this will bring us peace. It is a decision we have to make. We need to find room in our hearts for everyone; to believe that ethnic, regional, social, religious and cultural differences are secondary and not obstacles; that others are our brothers and sisters, members of the same human community; and that the peace brought into the world by Jesus is meant for everyone. We need to believe that we Christians are called to cooperate with everyone, to break the cycle of violence, to dismantle the machinations of hatred. Yes, Christians, sent by Christ, are called by definition to be *a conscience of peace in our world*. Not merely critical consciences, but primarily witnesses of love. Not concerned with their own rights, but with those of the Gospel, which are fraternity, love and forgiveness. Not concerned with their own affairs, but missionaries of the "mad love" of God for each human being.

Peace be with you, Jesus says today to every family, community, ethnic group, neighbourhood and city in this great country. *Peace be with you!* May these words of our Lord resound in the silence of our hearts. Let us hear them addressed to us and let us choose to be witnesses of *forgiveness*, builders of *community*, people charged with a *mission* of peace in our world.

Moto azalí na matóyi ma koyóka [Let those who have ears hear]

R/ Ayoka [Listen]

Moto azalí na motéma mwa kondima [Let those who heartily consent]

R/Andima [Consent]