



Homily

Homily for the closing of the International Meeting of Lay Brothers OFM

Our Lady of the Angels 2nd May 2025

My dear brothers,

May the Lord give you His peace!

At the end of our International Meeting of Lay Brothers, the Word of God enlightens us and guides us on our common path.

In the Acts of the Apostles we heard the wisdom of Gamaliel, who invites us to discern God's work with patience. *"If this design or this work is of men, it will be destroyed; but if it is of God, you will not be able to destroy them unless you also want to fight against God"* (Acts 5:38-39). What wisdom in these words! Gamaliel teaches us to look beyond appearances, to distinguish what is God's will from what is only a human project. God's desire is certainly not to bend man to the power of the strongest.

In the Gospel, we contemplate Jesus followed by a large crowd. This expression, which here indicates the people who followed Him because they had seen the signs He made on the sick, we find it, in the Fourth Gospel, only in the episode of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, when it is stated that *"the great crowd ... he hastened not only for Jesus, but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead"* (Jn 12:9; cf. also 12:12). There is a seeing of the signs performed by Jesus or their results (Lazarus raised from the dead) which for Jesus is equivalent to non-faith. St. John noted it: *"Many, seeing the signs He performed, believed in his name. But he, Jesus, did not trust them"* (Jn 2:23-24). Jesus does not trust in the faith of those who believe in Him on the basis of the observation of the wonders He has accomplished. Jesus teaches nothing, but in the sign of abundant bread He prepares for his Passover, the gift of His whole self.

Jesus looks at the crowds and shows concern to respond to their hunger and for this reason he involves the disciples. The initiative is his and is totally free. We could say that Jesus sees in the crowds a hunger that only He can satisfy. He is the one who awakens hunger and satisfies it: He is hunger and food: *"He who comes to me will hunger no more"* (Jn 6:35). The origin of that bread is in God and the disciples are called to participate in His work. Philip does not understand Jesus' profound intention and stops at the necessary expense. The crowds only understand the power of Jesus and want to make Him king; they thus distort the very direction of His life, which is marked by the power of service and love.

Jesus calls us to freedom and makes His life a teaching of freedom. He rejects the logic of those who think that *"Man does not seek God, but miracles"*. By rejecting kingship, Jesus refuses to use miracles and power as instruments of enslavement to man; it rejects domination over the conscience of the other. For Jesus there are no subjects, but brothers



Far-sightedness is recognizing man's true hunger and serving it: two essential attitudes for us Friars Minor in our evangelical life and in our service to the people of God.

Brothers, in these days we have reflected together on our identity as brothers and minors. Before any distinction between clerics and laity, we are all called to live the Gospel according to Francis' intuition. Our seraphic father wanted us to be "*younger brothers*", without adjectives that divide, without distinctions that create non-evangelical hierarchies, without a system of power that manipulates. For all of us, only the logic of love that gives life is valid.

St. Francis writes in his Testament: "*The Lord gave me brothers.*" He does not say that he gave him priests, or lay people, or preachers, or workers. He gave him "*brothers*". This fraternity is the heart of our charism, what unites us all, what precedes and transcends every functional distinction.

The meeting we are concluding today was an important step in our journey of revitalizing the one Franciscan vocation. We recognized the need for a profound conversion of mentality and culture. The clericalism that still afflicts us is not only an ecclesial problem, but a deformation of our charism. At the same time, we must be vigilant against the disenchantment and sloth that can affect all of us, clergy and laity, causing us to lose our passion for our way of life.

Like Gamaliel, we are called to discern what comes from God in our tradition and in our history. And like Jesus, we are invited to feel compassion for a humanity that is disoriented and in need of authentic guides, not being afraid of our time and the complexity of the mission entrusted to us.

Let us therefore return to our fraternities with a renewed heart. We carry with us the foresight of Gamaliel and the closeness of Jesus. Let us remember the courageous witness of Athanasius, defender of the divinity of Christ. Moreover, above all, let us not forget that we are all brothers and minors, called to live and proclaim the Gospel with simplicity and joy.

In our time marked by so many challenges, let us repeat with confidence the words that Saint Athanasius addressed to his faithful in the darkest moments: "*Even this little cloud will pass away*". For indeed, the victory of faith consists in continuing to believe even in our tribulations, that God loves us and guides us towards a greater good.

May the Lord bless us and always keep us in His love. Amen.

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