



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE

DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHA HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS "Christ forms the pastor's heart in closeness to the people of God"

Friday, 24 April 2020

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

Introduction

Let us pray today for teachers. They need to work hard to provide lessons via internet and in other ways. And let us also pray for students who need to take their exams in a way that they are not accustomed to. Let us accompany them with our prayer.

Homily

This sentence in this passage from the Gospel makes us think: "He said this to put him to the test, He Himself knew exactly what He was going to do" (see *Jn* 6:6). And that is what Jesus had in mind when He asked Philip, "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" (v. 5). He said it to put him to the test. He knew. Here we observe Jesus's behaviour with the disciples. He continually put them to the test in order to teach them. And when they deviated from the function they were to perform, He would stop them and teach them.

The Gospel is filled with these actions of Jesus, intended to make His disciples grow and become pastors of the people of God, in this case bishops: pastors of the people of God. And one of the things Jesus loved the most was to be with the crowd, because this too is a symbol of the universality of redemption. And one of the things the Apostles did not like was the crowd. They liked being near the Lord, listening to the Lord, hearing everything that the Lord said. That day they went there to rest. That is what the other Gospels say. Because all four Gospels talk about this... perhaps there were two multiplications of the loaves. They were coming back from a

mission, and the Lord said, "Let's go and rest awhile" (see *Mk 6:3*). And so they went there. And the people noticed where they were going by the sea, and they ran ahead along the shore and waited for them there. And the disciples were not happy, because the crowd had ruined their break; they couldn't have this feast with the Lord. In spite of this, Jesus began to teach, they started to speak among themselves, and the hours went by. Jesus spoke and the people were happy. And [the disciples] said, "Our feast has been ruined, our rest has been ruined".

But the Lord sought closeness to the people, and tried to form the hearts of the pastors to be near the people of God in order to serve them. And they understood that they had been chosen, and they felt that they were in a privileged circle, a type of aristocracy, we might say, near to the Lord. And many times the Lord made gestures to correct them. For example, let us think of the children. The disciples protected the Lord, saying to them, "Oh no, don't go near Him, don't disturb Him... No, children belong with their parents". And Jesus? "Let the children come to me" (see *Mk 10:13-16*). And they did not understand. Then they understood. Or we can think of the road to Jericho, that other one who called "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (*Lk 18:38*), and a person said, "Keep quiet. This is the Lord! Do not disturb Him". And Jesus says, "But who is that? Bring him here" (see *Lk 18:35-43*). Once again the Lord [corrects them]. And in this way He teaches them about being near to the people of God.

It is true that the people of God tire the pastor, they are tiring: when there is a good pastor, things multiply, because the people always go to a good pastor for one reason or another. Once, a great pastor in a simple, humble quarter in my diocese, had the rectory like a normal house, like any other, and people would come and knock on the door or on the window at all times... and once he said to me, "I would like to wall up the door and the window so they let me get some rest". But he knew he was a pastor and that he needed to be with the people! And Jesus forms and teaches the disciples. He teaches the apostles this pastoral behaviour, which is being near to the people of God. And the people of God are tiring, because they always ask us for concrete things; they always ask you for something real. Maybe they are mistaken in what they ask, but they are always concrete things. And so the pastor always needs to take care of these things.

The versions of the other evangelists of this episode show that the hours had passed and it was starting to get dark, but they say, "send the crowd away so that they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food" (see *Lk 9:12-13*). Right at the moment that it began to get dark. But what were they thinking of? That their own party could begin, that selfishness that is not bad, it is understandable, they wanted to stay with their shepherd, with Jesus who is the great shepherd. And Jesus answers, to put them to the test, "You give them something to eat" (see v. 13). And this is what Jesus says today to all pastors: "You give them something to eat". "Are they anguished? Give them consolation. Are they lost? Give them a way out. Have they made mistakes? Help to solve the problems. You give them, you give them...". And the poor apostle feels that he has to give, give, give... But from whom does he receive? Jesus teaches us: from the same One from whom Jesus receives. After this event, He bids farewell to the apostles and goes

to pray: from the Father, from prayer. This *dual closeness* of the pastor is what Jesus tries to make the apostles understand so that they may become great pastors.

But very often the crowd errs, and here it has made a mistake, hasn't it? "The people, seeing this sign that he had given, said, 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take Him by force and make Him king, escaped back to the hills by Himself" (*Jn 6:15-15*). Maybe, maybe - but the Gospel does not say it - one of the apostles might have said to him, "Lord, let's take advantage of this and take power". Another temptation. And Jesus makes them see that this is not the way. The power of the pastor is service, he has no other power; and when he makes the mistake of taking another power, he ruins the vocation and becomes, I don't know, a manager of "pastoral enterprises", but not a pastor.

Structure does not make pastoral ministry: it is *the heart of the pastor* that makes pastoral ministry. And the pastor's heart is what Jesus is teaching is now.

Let us ask the Lord today, for the pastors of the Church, that the Lord always speak to them, since He loves them so much; that He might speak to us always, that He might tell us how things are, that He explain to us and above all teach us not to be afraid of the people of God, not to be afraid to be near them.

Spiritual Communion

Those who cannot receive Communion may now make a spiritual communion.

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there, and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.