



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION (FEBIC)**

*Consistory Hall*

*Friday, 19 June 2015*

**[Multimedia]**

---

I welcome everyone. I thank Cardinal Tagle for his words; he has led me to digress somewhat from what has been prepared.... They are God's surprises, which help us to realize that all our plans, all our thoughts and so many things, before the living Word of God, the living Word, of the Living God, fall. They fall, they crumble. When a Church closes in on herself and forgets that she has been sent, that she has been dispatched to proclaim the Gospel, that is, the Good News, to move hearts with *Kerygma* — well said by the Cardinal — she grows old. Another thing the Cardinal said: she becomes weak. And I would also add two things: she gets sick and she dies.

I have heard it said, so many times, when speaking about the dioceses that were in North Africa in the time of St Augustine: they are dead Churches. No! There are two ways, two manners to die: either to die closed in on oneself or to die by giving one's life in witness. And a Church that has the courage — the *parrhesia* — to bring forth the Word of God and is not ashamed is on the path of martyrdom.

Today, in the First Reading of the Mass, we heard Paul who recounted the things he had suffered, from the perspective of "boasting": "They boast; I can also boast of what I have done" (cf. 2 Cor 11:21). This is the framework. But this man [St Paul], had he stayed there, in one of the Churches — such as that of Corinth — and only in that one, he would not have suffered all that he speaks of. Why? Because he was a man who went forth. When he saw that things were going well, he lay hands on another and went away. He is a model.

At the end he has this beautiful phrase, “to boast”, after I boast of this, of so many journeys, of countless beatings, of a stoning... all of this.... “But if I must boast” — today he said in that passage — “I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (cf. 2 Cor 11:30). In another passage — you biblicists know it — he says: “I will boast of my sins” (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). Paul’s third source of pride is not vanity: “My glory is the Cross of Jesus” (cf. Gal 6:14). This is his strength. And this is a Church that goes forth, a “martyrial” Church. She is a Church that goes on the road, that journeys. And what happens is what can happen to every person who goes on the road: an accident.... But I prefer a Church injured in an accident to a Church sick from being closed in on herself. With that *parrhesia* and that *hypomone*; that patience of bearing situations on one’s shoulders, but also the tenderness of carrying on one’s shoulders the wounded faithful, who have been consigned to her. A pastoral Church. Only the Word of God and, alongside the Word, the Eucharist. Brothers and Sisters who gather to praise the Lord precisely with the weakness of the bread and wine, of the Lord’s Body, of the Lord’s Blood.

The Word of God is not something that makes life easy. No, no. It always leads us to difficulty! If we carry it with sincerity, it leads to difficulty, it leads to embarrassment so often. But we must speak the truth, with tenderness, by bearing on our shoulders situations, people. It can be regarded as fraternal respect which is able “to caress”.

I thank the new President for his words. I thank all of you for the work that you do at the service of the Word of God.

One little *excursus*: one of the things that really concerns me is the act of proclaiming of the Word of God in homilies. Please, do everything you can to help your brothers — deacons, priests and bishops — to give the Word of God in homilies, so that it may touch the heart. Touched by a thought, an image, a feeling, but by the Word of God! So many are capable, but make mistakes and have a nice conference, a good dissertation, a fine school of theology.... The Word of God is sacramental! According to Luther it is a sacrament which acts practically *ex opere operato*. Then the trend is somewhat Tridentine, it is that of *ex opere operantis*; and then theologians found that the Word of God is in between: part *ex opere operato*, part *ex opere operantis*. It is sacramental. Speeches are not sacramental, they are discourses which do good. But homilies should have the Word of God, so that it may touch the heart!

Thank you! Thank you for your work.

What was written here [in the prepared address], which is good, I shall consign to the President.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you and greet you with the words of St Paul to the Christians of Philippi: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,... for your partnership in the gospel” (Phil 1:2-5).

I sincerely thank Cardinal Tagle, the new President, for the words of greeting he addressed to me also on behalf of all of you. I express gratitude to Archbishop Paglia for the service he has rendered to the Federation in these years.

You chose as the motto of this Tenth Plenary Assembly a passage from the First Letter of John: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn 1:3). In order to be able to proclaim the word of truth, we ourselves have to have experienced the Word: to have listened to it, contemplated it, practically touched it with our own hands.... (cf. 1 Jn 1:1). Christians, who are “God’s own people, that [you] may declare the wonderful deeds of him” (1 Pet 2:9), must first of all, as recommended by the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, venerate, read, listen to, proclaim, preach, study and spread the Word of God (cf. n. 25).

The Church, which proclaims the Word every day, receiving from it nourishment and inspiration, renders herself the beneficiary and excellent witness of that force and power intrinsic to the very Word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21). It is neither us, nor our efforts, but it is the Holy Spirit who works through those who dedicate themselves to the apostolate, and who works in the listeners as well, predisposing one and the other to hear the Word proclaimed and receive the message of life.

On the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, it seems very fitting that you should dedicate your Plenary Assembly to reflection on Sacred Scripture, the source of evangelization. St John Paul II, in 1986, invited you to carry out a careful rereading of the *Dei Verbum*, applying its principles and putting its recommendations into practice. Surely the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church offered another important occasion to reflect on its implementation. Today too, I would like to invite you to carry this work forward, always enhancing the wealth of the Conciliar Constitution, as well as the subsequent Magisterium, while you communicate the “joy of the Gospel” to the farthest ends of the earth, in obedience to the missionary mandate. “The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God ‘be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 174).

However, there are places in which the Word of God has not yet been proclaimed or, although proclaimed, has not been accepted as the Word of salvation. There are places where the Word of God is drained of its authority. The lack of support and force of the Word leads to a weakening of Christian communities of long established tradition and slows the spiritual growth and missionary

fervour of young Churches. We are all responsible should “the message run the risk of losing its freshness and cease to have ‘the fragrance of the Gospel’” (cf. *ibid.*, n. 39). Therefore, there is an open invitation to exercise an intense commitment to ensure the central role of the Word of God in ecclesial life, by promoting biblical reading throughout the pastoral ministry. We must ensure that in the usual activities of every Christian community, in parishes, in associations and movements, there actually be at heart the personal encounter with Christ who communicates himself to us in his Word, because, as St Jerome teaches us, “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 25).

The mission of the servants of the Word — bishops, priests, religious and lay people — is that of promoting and fostering this encounter, which arouses faith and transforms life; therefore I pray, on behalf of the entire Church, that you may bring to fruition your mandate: to ensure “that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph” (2 Thes 3:1), until the day of Christ Jesus.

May the “Handmaiden of the Lord”, who is blessed because she “believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken” (Lk 1:45), accompany you in these days as she accompanied the disciples in the first community, so that you may be guided by the light and the power of the Holy Spirit.