
Pope in Matera: “Shame on us for the battle between the rich and the poor”

(from Matera) The Pope's visit to Matera at the conclusion of the National Eucharistic Congress was unplanned. Shortly after the Holy Mass celebrated at the Municipal Stadium, **Pope Francis** proceeded by car to the *Mensa della Fraternità* soup kitchen dedicated to “Don Giovanni Mele”, a hallmark activity of the National Eucharistic Congress. In the first version of the official programme of the apostolic journey, eventually rescheduled, the visit was to take place today. And still, the blessing was imparted: the Pope entered the soup kitchen in a wheelchair, accompanied by the archbishop of Matera-Irsina, Msgr. **Antonio Giuseppe Caizzo**. Then the Pope paid a brief private visit, away from the TV cameras, to the soup kitchen run by the Giuseppe Tamburrino Foundation and presided over by Maria Teresa Di Muro, who had expressed her desire for the Pope's visit to SIR: “Even if the Pope should not come to visit us, we are preparing everything as though he were coming.” And her wish was fulfilled, shortly before Francis' flight back to Rome. A crowd of over 12,000 gathered in Matera's Stadium for the Eucharistic celebration concelebrated by the Pope together with 80 bishops, accompanied by the music of the Matera Symphony Choir and Orchestra, conducted by Maestro **Carmine Antonio Catenazzo**. 360 volunteers, joined by 200 men and women from the Civil Defence. “Here then is the ongoing challenge that the Eucharist offers to our lives: to worship God and not ourselves”, the Pope said: “To put him at the centre, and not the vanity of self,” For

“if we worship ourselves, we die suffocated by our small selves;

if we worship the riches of this world, they take possession of us and make us slaves; if we worship the god of appearance and inebriate ourselves in wastefulness, sooner or later life itself will ask us for the bill.” During the Angelus prayer, Francis extended a special thought to our Country:

“Today I would dare to ask for Italy: more births, more children”.

Lazarus covered with sores, and the rich man living in opulence and banquets: two ways of life in sharp contrast with each other still today. The rich man, Francis said referring to the Parable, “thinks only of his own wellbeing, of satisfying his needs, of enjoying life. In his life there is no place for God because he worships only himself.” It is not by chance that his name is not given. “How sad this situation is, also today, when we confuse what we are with what we have, when we judge people by the wealth they have, the roles they hold, or the brand of clothing they wear”, the Pope's warning:

“It is the religion of having and appearing, which often dominates the scene in this world, but which in the end leaves us empty-handed, always.”

For “I am not the things I possess or the successes I manage to achieve; the value of my life does not depend on how much I can show off, nor does it diminish when I falter and fail. I am a beloved child, each one of us is a beloved child, he who worships God does not become a slave to anyone: he is free.” Besides God's primacy, the Eucharist calls us to love our brothers and sisters: “Our eternal future depends on this present life: if we now dig an abyss with our brothers and sisters now, we “dig our own grave” for later; if we raise walls against our brothers and sisters now, we remain imprisoned in solitude and death afterwards too.” “Injustices, disparities, the earth's resources distributed unequally, the abuses perpetrated by the powerful against the weak, indifference to the cry of the poor, the abyss that we dig every day, generating marginalization – all these things cannot leave us indifferent.” The Eucharist, Francis observed, “is the prophecy of a new world, it is the presence of Jesus who asks us to work to make an effective conversion take place: conversion **from**

indifference to compassion, conversion from waste to sharing, conversion from selfishness to love, conversion from individualism to fraternity.”

“Let us dream of a Eucharistic Church”,

the identikit of a synodal Church: “Made up of women and men who offer themselves as bread for all those who are fed loneliness and poverty, for those who hunger for tenderness and compassion, for those whose lives are crumbling because the good leaven of hope has been lacking. A Church that kneels before the Eucharist and worships with awe the Lord present in the bread; but which also knows how to bend with compassion and tenderness before the wounds of those who suffer, lifting up the poor, wiping away the tears of those who suffer, making itself the bread of hope and joy for all. Because there is no true Eucharistic worship without compassion for the many “Lazaruses” who even today walk beside us.” **“Let us return to Jesus, let us return to the Eucharist”**, the Pope concluded from Matera, city of bread: “Let us return to the taste of bread to be a Eucharistic Church, which puts Jesus at the centre and becomes the bread of tenderness, the bread of mercy for all.”

“Let us think seriously today about the rich man and Lazarus”, the Pope adds off text: “It happens every day, this. And very often also – shame on us – it happens in us, this battle between us, in the community.”

“I would like to thank you for having come, thank you for this effort that you willingly, and always with a smile, undertook to be with us. You are an example for everyone, not least for so many long-faced persons”, were the words of gratitude expressed by Card. Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, who echoed the Pope's words, warning against the 'virus' of individualism. “War scorches wheat fields, it deprives people of bread and starves them, turns brothers into enemies”, his reference to current events. “In a world like this we have rediscovered the pleasure of breaking his bread with the many, too many, Lazarus excluded from the tables of the rich, tabernacle of the body of Christ”, the summary of the days in the City of Stones.

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