

Managing disorder and living with the heart

Pope Francis

As bishop of Rome, Francis closely accompanies his diocese in its journey as the Church, undertaking a path whereby it seeks to look clearly at the life of the city and listen to the "cry" of its people. As a lead into the focus this Ekklesia issue, we present a few salient excerpts from a speech given by Francis to participants at the annual diocesan congress held in St. John Lateran Basilica on May 9th, 2020. Pope Francis' remarks were preceded by a series of testimonies.

The first temptation which can arise after having listened to many difficulties, problems, and shortcomings is: "No, no, we have to reorganise the city, *put things in order* in the diocese, sort everything out." This would mean looking at ourselves, turning our gaze onto ourselves. Yes, things will have been put in order and we will have sorted things out at the "museum", reorganised the city's ecclesiastical museum... [...] But, the point is not to 'put things in order'... We have heard [in the previous talks] about disorder throughout the city, the disorder of young people, of the elderly, in families... The disorders in relation to children... Today we have been called to handle *the disorder*. We can do nothing good or evangelical if we are afraid of disorder. We must grasp these imbalances with both hands: this is what the Lord tells us, because the Gospel – I believe you will understand -- is an "unbalanced" doctrine. Take the Beatitudes: they are worthy of the Nobel Prize for disorder! That is how the Gospel is.

The Apostles became nervous at sunset when the crowd – five thousand, counting only the men – continued to listen to Jesus and they looked at their watches and said, "This is too much. We have to say Vespers, Compline ... and then eat...". Attempting to find a way to 'resolve' everything, they approached the Lord and said, "Lord, send them away, because this is a lonely place. Let them go and buy themselves something to eat" in the desert plains. This is the illusory order of "Church" people, with inverted comma. I believe – and I have said this on a prior occasion somewhere -- that this is where *clericalism* began: "Send the people away, (get them out of here?) that they get out of here, and we can eat what we have". [...]

And then, with this way of "organising things" will give us a beautifully functioning diocese. Clericalism and *functionalism*. I am thinking – and I say this with charity, but I must

say it – to a diocese – and there are many but I am thinking of one in particular where everything is functionalised: This department, that department, and each department has four, five, six specialists who study things... That diocese [...] gets further each day from Jesus Christ because “harmony” becomes a cult, a harmony not of beauty but of functional mundaneness. In these cases, we have fallen prey to the dictatorship of functionalism. It is a new ideological colonialization that seeks to convince [everyone] that the Gospel is wisdom and doctrine, but not an announcement, not a *kerygma*.

So, this evening, I want to better understand *the cry of the people of the diocese*: this will help us better understand what the people are asking of the Lord. That cry is a cry that often even we do not listen to or which we easily forget about. And this happens because we have ceased to *live with the heart*. We live with ideas, with pastoral plans, with the latest fashion, with set solutions. Yet, what is needed is to live with the heart. [...] If the Church does not take these steps it will remain stationary because it does not listen with the heart. The Church will be deaf to the cry of the people, deaf to listening to the city. [...]

Keep this present in your hearts and minds. *When the Lord wishes to convert his Church*, that is, to bring it closer to Himself and more Christian, *he always does this: he takes the smallest and puts them at the centre*, inviting everyone to become small and to “humble themselves”. The gospel text literally tells us to become little as he, Jesus, did. [cf. Mt 18:1-14] [...] Only those who follow Jesus on this road of humility and make themselves little can truly contribute to the mission entrusted to us by the Lord. Whoever seeks their own glory will neither know how to listen to others nor listen to God. So, how can they collaborate in the mission? [...] All the space inside oneself is occupied by him or herself, or by the group to which they belong. – like us many times – and thus he or she has neither eyes nor ears for others. Therefore, the first thought to have at heart is to know how to listen, is *humility* and guard against looking down on those who are little, whoever they may be – young people who are orphaned or ended up down the dark tunnel of drugs; families struggling with the daily grind or by the break-up of relationships; sinners, the poor, the foreigners, people who have lost faith, people who have never had faith, the old, the disabled, the youth of today looking for bread on the rubbish dump [...]. Those who are without humility or who despise others will never make a good evangeliser because they never look beyond appearances. They will think of the others as only enemies, as “Godless”, and will miss the opportunity to listen to the cry which [the others] have within them, that cry which is often suffering and a dream of something “beyond” and within which the need for salvation is manifest. If pride and presumptions of being morally superior do not dull our hearing, we will realise that underneath the cry of so many people there is something else, which is the true groaning of the Holy Spirit. [...]

The necessary, second leg of the journey, in order hear this cry, is one of *detachment*. It is expressed in the gospel passage about the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. This good shepherd has no personal interest to protect. The only worry is that none will be lost. Do those of us here this evening have personal interests? Everyone can think to themselves: what hidden self-interest is there in my ecclesial activity? Vanity? I don't know... everyone has their own. Are we preoccupied with our parish structures? With the

future of our institution? With social acceptance? With what people will say if we work with the poor, with immigrants, with the Romanies? Or are we attached to that bit of power we still have over those in our community or our district? [...] Detachment from self is the necessary condition to be able to be fully engaged in God's interests and the interests of others so that we can truly listen to them. There is the sin of admiring ourselves in the mirror¹. And we, priests, sisters, lay people with the vocation of work, fall many times into admiring ourselves in the mirror. It is called *narcissism and self-referencing*, the sins of admiring ourselves end up suffocating us. The Lord listened to the cry of those he met and became their neighbour because *he had nothing to defend and nothing to lose*. He did not have "a mirror": he had consciousness in prayer, in contemplation with the Father and the unction of the Holy Spirit. This was his secret and because of this he was able to go ahead. He left the ninety-nine who were safe and set himself in search of the one who was lost. We, however, as I have said on other occasions, are often obsessed with the few sheep who have remained in the pen. [...] We never find the courage to search for the others, those which are lost, who go on *paths upon which we have never ventured*. [...]

The third stretch of the heart's journey, one necessary in order to be able to hear the cry and to evangelise, is that of having *experienced the Beatitudes* [...]: which means to have learned from the Lord and from life *what true joy is*, that [joy] which the Lord gives us. We have to learn how to discern, how to find it and enable others to find it without embarking on the wrong road. To the vulnerable, to those wounded by life or by sin, and to the least ones crying out to God, we can and must offer the life of the Beatitudes, which we too have experienced. We must offer the joy of encountering *the mercy of God*, the beauty of a communitarian life, of family, in which one is welcomed for what he or she is in truly human relationships full of *meekness*. [...] The simplest means of listening, of speaking face to face, of reciprocal help in moments of weariness or persecution, the daily splendour of contemplating the face of God in the liturgy with a pure heart, in listening to the Word, in prayer, in the poor... Does all this seem small to you? This is the path. [...]

Unofficial translation

¹ Pope Francis uses the Italian expression '*il peccato dello specchio*' – literally '*the sin of the mirror*' – for which there is no English equivalent. *Ed.*