



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS AND TE DEUM
ON THE OCCASION OF THE BICENTENNIAL
OF THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Chiesa del Gesù
Saturday, 27 September 2014

Video

Dear brothers and friends in the Lord,

The Society under the name of Jesus has lived difficult times of persecution. During the leadership of Fr Lorenzo Ricci, "enemies of the Church succeeded in obtaining the suppression of the Society" (John Paul II, Message to Fr Kolvenbach, July 31, 1990) by my predecessor Clement XIV. Today, remembering its restoration, we are called to recover our memory, calling to mind the benefits received and the particular gifts (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 234). Today, I want to do that here with you.

In times of trial and tribulation, dust clouds of doubt and suffering are always raised and it is not easy to move forward, to continue the journey. Many temptations come, especially in difficult times and in crises: to stop to discuss ideas, to allow oneself to be carried away by the desolation, to focus on the fact of being persecuted, and not to see anything else. Reading the letters of Fr Ricci, one thing struck me: his ability to avoid being blocked by these temptations and to propose to the Jesuits, in a time of trouble, a vision of the things that rooted them even more in the spirituality of the Society.

Father General Ricci, who wrote to the Jesuits at the time, watching the clouds thickening on the horizon, strengthened them in their membership in the body of the Society and its mission. This is

the point: in a time of confusion and turmoil he discerned. He did not waste time discussing ideas and complaining, but he took on the charge of the vocation of the Society. He had to preserve the Society and he took charge of it.

And this attitude led the Jesuits to experience the death and resurrection of the Lord. Faced with the loss of everything, even of their public identity, they did not resist the will of God, they did not resist the conflict, trying to save themselves. The Society - and this is beautiful - lived the conflict to the end, without minimizing it. It lived humiliation along with the humiliated Christ; it obeyed. You never save yourself from conflict with cunning and with strategies of resistance. In the confusion and humiliation, the Society preferred to live the discernment of God's will, without seeking a way out of the conflict in a seemingly quiet manner. Or at least in an elegant way: this they did not do.

It is never apparent tranquillity that satisfies our hearts, but true peace that is a gift from God. One should never seek the easy "compromise" nor practice facile "irenicism". Only discernment saves us from real uprooting, from the real "suppression" of the heart, which is selfishness, worldliness, the loss of our horizon. Our hope is Jesus; it is only Jesus. Thus Fr Ricci and the Society during the suppression gave priority to history rather than a possible grey "little tale", knowing that love judges history and that hope - even in darkness - is greater than our expectations.

Discernment must be done with right intention, with a simple eye. For this reason, Fr Ricci is able, precisely in this time of confusion and bewilderment, to speak about the sins of the Jesuits. He does not defend himself, feeling himself to be a victim of history, but he recognizes himself as a sinner. Looking at oneself and recognizing oneself as a sinner avoids being in a position of considering oneself a victim before an executioner. Recognizing oneself as a sinner, really recognizing oneself as a sinner, means putting oneself in the correct attitude to receive consolation.

We can review briefly this process of discernment and service that this Father General indicated to the Society. When in 1759, the decrees of Pombal destroyed the Portuguese provinces of the Society, Fr Ricci lived the conflict, not complaining and letting himself fall into desolation, but inviting prayers to ask for the good spirit, the true supernatural spirit of vocation, the perfect docility to God's grace. When in 1761, the storm spread to France, the Father General asked that all trust be placed in God. He wanted that they take advantage of the hardships suffered to reach a greater inner purification; such trials lead us to God and can serve for his greater glory. Then, he recommends prayer, holiness of life, humility and the spirit of obedience. In 1760, after the expulsion of the Spanish Jesuits, he continues to call for prayer. And finally, on February 21, 1773, just six months before the signing of the Brief *Dominus ac Redemptor*, faced with a total lack of human help, he sees the hand of God's mercy, which invites those undergoing trials not to place their trust in anyone but God. Trust must grow precisely when circumstances throw us to the ground. Of importance for Fr Ricci is that the Society, until the last, should be true to the spirit of its vocation, which is for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The Society, even faced with its own demise, remained true to the purpose for which it was founded. In this light, Ricci concludes with an exhortation to keep alive the spirit of charity, unity, obedience, patience, evangelical simplicity, true friendship with God. Everything else is worldliness. The flame of the greater glory of God even today flows through us, burning every complacency and enveloping us in a flame, which we have within, which focuses us and expands us, makes us grow and yet become less.

In this way, the Society lived through the supreme test of the sacrifice unjustly asked of it, taking up the prayer of Tobit, who with a soul struck by grief, sighs, cries and then prays: "You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are just; all your ways are mercy and truth; you judge the world. And now, O Lord, remember me and look favorably upon me. Do not punish me for my sins and for my unwitting offenses and those that my ancestors committed before you. They sinned against you, and disobeyed your commandments. So you gave us over to plunder, exile, and death, to become the talk, the byword, and an object of reproach among all the nations among whom you have dispersed us". It concludes with the most important request: "Do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me". (Tb 3,1-4.6d).

And the Lord answered by sending Raphael to remove the white spots from Tobit's eyes, so that he could once again see the light of God. God is merciful, God crowns with mercy. God loves us and saves us. Sometimes the path that leads to life is narrow and cramped, but tribulation, if lived in the light of mercy, purifies us like fire, brings much consolation and inflames our hearts, giving them a love for prayer. Our brother Jesuits in the suppression were fervent in the spirit and in the service of the Lord, rejoicing in hope, constant in tribulation, persevering in prayer (cf. Rom 12:13). And that gave honour to the Society, but certainly not in praise of its merits. It will always be this way.

Let us remember our history: "the Society was given the grace not only to believe in the Lord, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). We do well to remember this.

The ship of the Society has been tossed around by the waves and there is nothing surprising in this. Even the boat of Peter can be tossed about today. The night and the powers of darkness are always near. It is tiring to row. The Jesuits must be brave and expert rowers (Pius VII, *Sollecitudo omnium ecclesiarum*): row then! Row, be strong, even against a headwind! We row in the service of the Church. We row together! But while we row - we all row, even the Pope rows in the boat of Peter - we must pray a lot, "Lord, save us! Lord save your people." The Lord, even if we are men of little faith, will save us. Let us hope in the Lord! Let us hope always in the Lord!

The Society, restored by my predecessor Pius VII, was made up of men, who were brave and humble in their witness of hope, love and apostolic creativity, which comes from the Spirit. Pius VII wrote of wanting to restore the Society to "supply himself in an adequate way for the spiritual needs of the Christian world, without any difference of peoples and nations" (ibid). For this, he

gave permission to the Jesuits, which still existed here and there, thanks to a Lutheran monarch and an Orthodox monarch, "to remain united in one body." That the Society may remain united in one body!

And the Society was immediately missionary and made itself available to the Apostolic See, committing itself generously "under the banner of the cross for the Lord and His Vicar on earth" (Formula of the Institute, 1). The Society resumed its apostolic activity of preaching and teaching, spiritual ministries, scientific research and social action, the missions and care for the poor, the suffering and the marginalized.

Today, the Society also deals with the tragic problem of refugees and displaced persons with intelligence and energy; and it strives with discernment to integrate the service of faith and the promotion of justice in conformity with the Gospel. I confirm today what Paul VI told us at our 32nd General Congregation and which I heard with my own ears: "Wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme situations, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, where there has been and there is confrontation between the deepest desires of man and the perennial message of the Gospel, Jesuits have been present and are present." These are prophetic words of the future Blessed Paul VI.

In 1814, at the time of the restoration, the Jesuits were a small flock, a "least Society," but which knew how to invest, after the test of the cross, in the great mission of bringing the light of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is how we must feel today therefore: outbound, in mission. The Jesuit identity is that of a man who loves God and loves and serves his brothers, showing by example not only what he believes, but also what he hopes, and who is the One in whom he has put his trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:12). The Jesuit wants to be a companion of Jesus, one who has the same feelings of Jesus.

The bull of Pius VII that restored the Society was signed on August 7, 1814, at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where our holy father Ignatius celebrated his first Mass on Christmas Eve of 1538. Mary, Our Lady, Mother of the Society, will be touched by our efforts to be at the service of her Son. May she watch over us and protect us always.