



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 6 November 2013

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Last Wednesday I spoke about the communion of saints, understood as a communion among holy people, that is among us believers. Today I would like to go in depth into the other aspect of this reality: you will remember that there were two aspects: one is communion, unity, among us, and the other aspect is communion in holy things, *in spiritual goods*. These two aspects are closely connected; in fact, communion among Christians grows through the sharing of spiritual goods. In particular we will consider: *the Sacraments, charisms and charity* (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 949-953). We grow in unity, in communion, through: the Sacraments, the charisms given to each of us by the Holy Spirit, and charity.

First of all, the *communion of the Sacraments*. The Sacraments express and realize an effective and profound communion among us, for in them we encounter Christ the Saviour and, through him, our brothers and sisters in faith. The Sacraments are not mere appearances, they are not rituals; they are the power of Christ; Jesus Christ is present in the Sacraments. When we celebrate the Eucharist it is the living Jesus who brings us together, forms us into a community, allows us to adore the Father. Each one of us, in fact, through Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, is incorporated into Christ and united to the entire community of believers. Therefore, if on the one hand it is the Church that “makes” the Sacraments, on the other, it is the Sacraments that “make” the Church, that build her up, by generating new children, by gathering them into the holy people of God, by strengthening their membership.

Every encounter with Christ, who in the Sacraments gives us salvation, invites us to “go” and communicate to others the salvation that we have been able to see, to touch, to encounter and to receive, and which is truly credible because it is love. In this way, the Sacraments spur us to be missionaries, and the Apostolic commitment to carry the Gospel into every setting, including those most hostile, is the most authentic fruit of an assiduous sacramental life, since it is a participation in the saving initiative of God, who desires salvation for all people. The grace of the Sacraments nourishes in us a strong and joyful faith, a faith that knows how to stand in wonder before the “marvels” of God and how to resist the idols of the world. That is why it is important to take Communion, it is important that children be baptized early, that they be confirmed, because the Sacraments are the presence of Jesus Christ in us, a presence that helps us. It is important, when we feel the weight of our sin to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Someone might say: “But I am afraid that the priest will chastise me”. No, the priest will not chastise you. Do you know who you will encounter in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? You will encounter Jesus who pardons you! Jesus is waiting for you there; and this is a Sacrament that makes the whole Church grow.

A second aspect of communion in holy things is the *communion of charisms*. The Holy Spirit distributes to the faithful a multitude of spiritual gifts and graces; the “imaginative” wealth, let us say, of gifts of the Holy Spirit is ordered to building up the Church. The charisms — that word is a little difficult — are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, talents, possibilities.... Gifts given not to be hidden but to be shared with others. They are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them, but for the use of the People of God. If a charism, one of these gifts, serves instead as self-affirmation, then it is doubtful that we are dealing with an authentic charism or one faithfully lived out. The charisms are special graces, given to some for the good of many others. They are attitudes, inspirations and interior promptings that are born in the consciences and experiences of certain people, who are called to put themselves at the service of the community. In particular, these spiritual gifts further the sanctity of the Church and her mission. We are all called to respect them in ourselves and in others, to receive them as serving the Church’s fruitful presence and work. St Paul warns: “Do not quench the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19). Let us not quench the Spirit who gives us these gifts, these abilities, these very beautiful virtues that make the Church grow.

What is our attitude to the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Are we aware that the Spirit of God is free to give them to whomsoever he wishes? Do we consider them as a spiritual help, through which the Lord sustains our faith and reinforces our mission in the world?

And we come to the third aspect of communion in holy things, that is, *communion in charity*, the unity among us that creates charity, love. The gentiles, observing the early Christians, said: how they love each other, how they wish one another well! They do not hate, they do not speak against one another. This is the charity, the love of God that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts. The charisms are important in the life of the Christian community, but they are always a means for growth in charity, in love, which St Paul sets above the charisms (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13). Without love, in fact, even the most extraordinary gifts are in vain; this man heals people, he has that power, this

other virtue... but does he have love and charity in his heart? If he does then all is well, but if he does not he is no servant of the Church. Without love no gift or charism could serve the Church, for where there is not love there is an emptiness that becomes filled with selfishness. And I ask myself: if we all were egotistical, could we live in communion and peace? No, it's not possible, that is why it is necessary that love unite us. Our smallest gesture of love benefits everyone! Therefore, to live out unity in the Church and communion in charity means not seeking one's own interests but sharing the suffering and the joy of one's brothers (cf. 1 Cor 12:26), ready to carry the weight of the poorest and the weakest. This fraternal solidarity is not a figure of speech, a saying, but an integral part of the communion among Christians. If we live it, we are a sign to the world, the "sacrament" of God's love. This is what we are one for another and what we are for all! It is not just petty love that we can offer one another, but something much more profound: it is a communion that renders us capable of entering into the joy and sorrow of others and making them sincerely our own.

Often we are too dry, indifferent and detached and rather than transmitting brotherhood, we communicate bad temper, coldness and selfishness. And with bad temper, coldness and selfishness the Church cannot grow; the Church grows only by the love that comes from the Holy Spirit. The Lord invites us to open ourselves to communion with him, in the Sacraments, in the charisms and in charity, in order to live out our Christian vocation with dignity!

And now let me ask you for an act of charity: relax, it is not a collection! Before coming into the Square I went to see a little girl, a year and half old, who is gravely ill. Her father and mother are praying, and asking the Lord to heal this beautiful little girl. Her name is Noemi. The poor little one was smiling! Let us perform an act of love. We do not know her, but she is a baptized child, she is one of us, she is a Christian. Let us perform an act of love for her and in silence ask the Lord for his help in this moment and that he grant her health. Let us take a moment of silence and then we will pray the "Hail Mary". And now all together let us pray to Our Lady for the health of Noemi. *Hail Mary*.... Thank you for this act of charity.

To special groups

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including those from England and Wales, Ireland, Denmark, Australia, Japan and the United States. In a special way I greet the priests from England celebrating the anniversaries of their ordination. I also thank the choirs present for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, I greet *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. The month of November, dedicated to the memory of and prayer for the deceased, offers us the opportunity to consider more deeply the meaning of earthly life and the value of eternal life. May these days be for your all a stimulus to

understanding that life has value if it is spent loving God and neighbour.

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