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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis in Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius (4 to 10 September 2019) – Holy Mass in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay and Recitation of the Angelus prayer

Holy Mass in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay

The Pope's words at the recitation of the Angelus prayer in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay

Holy Mass in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay

This morning, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay to celebrate Holy Mass.

Upon arrival, after a tour among the faithful by popemobile, at 10.00 (9.00 in Rome), the Pope presided at the Eucharistic Celebration of the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time. The relics of Blessed Rafael Luis Rafiringa, beatified on 7 June 2009 in Antananarivo, were displayed on the altar.

After the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father pronounced his homily.

At the end, before the final blessing and the recitation of the *Angelus*, Archbishop Odon Marie Arsène Razanakolona addressed a greeting to Pope Francis.

The following is the text of the homily the Holy Father pronounced during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

The Gospel tells us that “great multitudes accompanied Jesus” (*Lk* 14:25). Like the multitudes gathered along his path, you too have come in great numbers to receive his message and follow in his footsteps. But you also know that following Jesus is not easy. You haven’t had much rest, and many of you have even spent the night here. Today, Luke’s Gospel reminds us of how demanding that commitment can be.

We should realize that Luke sets out those demands within his account of Jesus’ ascent to Jerusalem. He starts with the parable of the banquet to which everyone is invited, especially the outcasts living on the streets, in the squares and at the crossroads. And he concludes with the three “parables of mercy”, where a party is celebrated when what was lost was found, where someone who seemed dead is welcomed with joy and restored to life with the possibility of making a new start. For us as Christians, our sacrifices only make sense in the light of the joyful celebration of our encounter with Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ first demand has to do with family relationships. The new life the Lord holds out to us seems troubling and scandalously unjust to those who think that entry into the kingdom of heaven can be limited or reduced only to bonds of blood or membership in a particular group, clan or particular culture. When “family” becomes the decisive criterion for what we consider right and good, we end up justifying and even “consecrating” practices that lead to the culture of privilege and exclusion: favouritism, patronage and, as a consequence, corruption. The Master demands that we see beyond this. He says this clearly: anyone incapable of seeing others as brothers or sisters, of showing sensitivity to their lives and situations regardless of their family, cultural or social background “cannot be my disciple” (*Lk* 14:26). His devoted love is a free gift given to all and meant for all.

Jesus’ second demand shows us how hard it is to follow him if we seek to identify the kingdom of heaven with our personal agenda or our attachment to an ideology that would abuse the name of God or of religion to justify acts of violence, segregation and even murder, exile, terrorism and marginalization. This demand encourages us not to dilute and narrow the Gospel message, but instead to build history in fraternity and solidarity, in complete respect for the earth and its gifts, as opposed to any form of exploitation. It encourages us to practise “dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard” (*Document on Human Fraternity*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019). And not to be tempted by teachings that fail to see that the wheat and the chaff must grow together until the return of the Master of the harvest (cf. *Mt* 13:24-30).

Finally, how difficult it can be to share the new life that the Lord offers us when we are continually driven to self-justification, because we think that everything depends exclusively on our efforts and resources! Or, as we heard in the first reading, when the race to amass possessions becomes stifling and overwhelming, which only increases our selfishness and our willingness to use immoral means. Jesus’ demand is that we rediscover how to be grateful and to realize that, much more than a personal triumph, our life and our talents are the fruit of a gift (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 55), a gift created by God through the silent interplay of so many people whose names we will only know in the kingdom of heaven.

With these three demands, the Lord wants to prepare his disciples for the celebration of the coming of the kingdom of God, and to free them from the grave obstacle that, in the end, is one of the worst forms of enslavement: living only for oneself. It is the temptation to fall back into our little universe, and it ends up leaving little room for other people. The poor no longer enter in, we no longer hear the voice of God, we no longer enjoy the quiet joy of his love, we are no longer eager to do good... Many people, by shutting themselves up in this way, can feel “apparently” secure, yet they end up becoming bitter, querulous and lifeless. This is no way to live a full and dignified life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit that has its source in the heart of the risen Christ (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2).

With these demands, the Lord, as he walks towards Jerusalem, asks us to lift our gaze, to adjust our priorities and, above all, to make room for God to be the centre and axis of our life.

As we look around us, how many men and women, young people and children are suffering and in utter need! This is not part of God’s plan. How urgently Jesus calls us to die to our self-centredness, our individualism and our pride! In this way, we can allow the spirit of fraternity to triumph – a spirit born from the pierced side of Jesus

Christ, in which we are born as God's family – and in which everyone can feel loved because understood, accepted and appreciated in his or her dignity. "In the face of contempt for human dignity, we often remain with arms folded or stretched out as a sign of our frustration before the grim power of evil. Yet we Christians cannot stand with arms folded in indifference, or with arms outstretched in helplessness. No. As believers, we must stretch out our hands, as Jesus does with us" (*Homily for the World Day of the Poor*, 18 November 2018).

The Word of God that we have just heard bids us set out once more, daring to take this qualitative leap and to adopt this wisdom of personal detachment as the basis for social justice and for our personal lives. Together we can resist all those forms of idolatry that make us think only of the deceptive securities of power, career, money and of the search for human glory.

The demands that Jesus sets before us cease to be burdensome as soon as we begin to taste the joy of the new life that he himself sets before us. It is the joy born of knowing that he is the first to seek us at the crossroads, even when we are lost like the sheep or the prodigal son. May this humble realism – it is a realism, a Christian realism – inspire us to take on great challenges and give you the desire to make your beautiful country a place where the Gospel becomes life, and where life is for the greater glory of God.

Let us commit ourselves and let us make the Lord's plans our own.

The Pope's words at the recitation of the Angelus prayer in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay

At the end of the Holy Mass, before the final blessing, Pope Francis guided the recitation of the *Angelus* with the faithful present in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay. After the recitation of the *Angelus*, the Holy Father greeted and thanked the authorities present, and returned by car to the apostolic nunciature, where he lunched with the papal entourage.

The following are the Pope's words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

Dear brothers and sisters, at the conclusion of this celebration, I would like to address a cordial greeting to all of you!

From the heart, I thank Archbishop Razanakolona for his kind words, and with him my other brother bishops present, the priests, consecrated persons, married couples and their families, catechists and all the faithful.

I take this occasion to express my deep gratitude to the President of the Republic and the civil authorities of the country for their generous welcome, as well as all those who have contributed in various ways to the successful outcome of my Visit. May the Lord reward you and bless all your people, through the intercession of Blessed Raphaël Louis Rafiringa, whose relics are enshrined near this altar, and Blessed Victoire Rasoamanarivo.

And now, let us turn in prayer to the Blessed Virgin on this day that commemorates her Nativity, the dawn of salvation for humanity. May Mary Immaculate, whom you love and venerate as your Mother and Patroness, ever accompany the journey of Madagascar in peace and hope.
