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## **Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Cyprus and Greece – Holy Mass in GSP Stadium in Nicosia**

### **Holy Mass in GSP Stadium in Nicosia**

This morning, after leaving the Orthodox Cathedral, the Holy Father Francis celebrated Holy Mass in memory of Saint Francis Xavier, in the GSP Stadium in Nicosia, with the participation of around 10,000 faithful.

Introduced by a greeting from the Patriarch of the Latins of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Pope delivered his homily during the Eucharistic Celebration, after the proclamation of the Gospel.

At the end of the Holy Mass, Archbishop Selim Jean Sfeir of Cyprus of the Maronites addressed a greeting and thanks to the Holy Father. Pope Francis then transferred by car to the apostolic nunciature, where upon arrival he briefly met the Chief Rabbi of Cyprus and through him sent a greeting to the Cypriot Jewish community. He then greeted the Director of the Cypriot Prison, who brought him a greeting and a gift from the inmates, including migrants imprisoned because of their lack of documents. The Pope then lunched privately.

The following are the Pope's homily and final greeting during the Holy Mass:

### **Homily of the Holy Father**

As Jesus was passing by, two blind men cried out in misery and hope: "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (Mt 9:27). "Son of David" was a title attributed to the Messiah, who the prophecies predicted would come from the line of David. The two men in today's Gospel are blind, yet they see the most important thing: they realize that Jesus is the Messiah who has come into the world. Let us reflect on three steps in this encounter. They can help us in turn, during this Advent season, to welcome the Lord when he comes, when he passes by us.

First: *They went to Jesus for healing.* The text says that the two blind men cry out to the Lord while following him

(cf. v. 27). They cannot see him, but they hear his voice and follow in his footsteps. In Christ, they are seeking what the prophets had foretold: signs of God's healing power and compassion present in the midst of his people. Isaiah had written: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (35:5). And yet another prophecy, which we heard in today's first reading, had promised: "Out of their gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see" (29:18). The two men in the Gospel trusted in Jesus. They followed him in search of light for their eyes.

Why, brothers and sisters, did they trust in Jesus? Because they realized that, within the darkness of history, he is the light that brightens the "nights" of the heart and the world. The light that overcomes the darkness and triumphs over the blindness. We too have a kind of "blindness" in our hearts. Like those two blind men, we are often like wayfarers, immersed in the darkness of life. The first thing to do in response is *go to Jesus*, just as he tells us: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Mt 11:28*). Is there any one of us who is not, in some way, tired or heavy laden? All of us are. Yet, we resist coming to Jesus. Often we would rather remain closed in on ourselves, alone in the darkness, feeling sorry for ourselves and content to have sadness as our companion. Jesus is the divine physician: he alone is the true light that illuminates every man and woman (cf. *Jn 1:9*), the one who gives us an abundance of light, warmth and love. Jesus alone frees the heart from evil. So let us ask ourselves: do I remain wrapped in the darkness of despondency and joylessness, or do I go to Jesus and give my life to him? Do I follow Jesus, shout out my needs, and hand my bitterness over to him? Let us do it! Let us give Jesus the chance to heal our hearts. That is the first step; but interior healing requires two further steps.

The next step: *They shared their pain*. The Gospel does not speak of the healing of an individual blind person, as was the case, for example, with Bartimaeus (cf. *Mk 10:46-52*) or the man blind from birth (cf. *Jn 9:1-41*). Here there are two blind men. They are together on the roadside. They share their pain, their unhappiness at being blind, and their desire for a light to glow in the heart of their "night". When they speak, it is in the plural, since they do everything together: both of them follow Jesus, both cry out to him and ask for healing; not each for himself, but together, as one. Significantly, they say to Christ: *Have mercy on us*. On "us", not on "me". They ask for help together. This is an eloquent sign of the Christian life and the distinctive trait of the ecclesial spirit: to think, to speak and to act as "we", renouncing the individualism and the sense of self-sufficiency that infect the heart.

In the sharing of their suffering and their fraternal friendship, these two blind men have much to teach us. Each of us is blind in some way as a result of sin, which prevents us from "seeing" God as our Father and one another as brothers and sisters. For that is what sin does; it distorts reality: it makes us see God as a tyrant and each other as problems. It is the work of the tempter, who distorts things, putting them in a negative light, in order to make us fall into despair and bitterness. And then we become prey to a terrible sadness, which is dangerous and not from God. We must not face the darkness alone. If we bear our inner blindness alone, we can become overwhelmed. We need to stand beside one another, to share our pain and to face the road ahead together.

Dear brothers and sisters, faced with our own inner darkness and the challenges before us in the Church and in society, we are called to renew our sense of fraternity. If we remain divided, if each person thinks only of himself or herself, or his or her group, if we refuse to stick together, if we do not dialogue and walk together, we will never be completely healed of our blindness. Healing takes place when we carry our pain together, when we face our problems together, when we listen and speak to one another. That is *the grace of living in community*, of recognizing how important it is to be together, *to be community*. This is what I ask for you: that you always remain together, always united; that you go forward together with joy as Christian brothers and sisters, children of the one Father. And I ask it for myself as well.

And now, the third step: *They joyfully proclaimed the Good News*. After Jesus healed them, the two men in Gospel, in whom we can see a reflection of ourselves, began to spread the good news to the entire region, the talk about it everywhere. There is a bit of irony in this. Jesus had told them to tell no one what had happened, yet they do exactly the opposite (cf. *Mt 9:30-31*). From what we are told, it is clear that their intention was not to disobey the Lord; they were simply unable to contain their excitement at their healing and the joy of their encounter with Jesus. This is another distinctive sign of the Christian: the irrepressible joy of the Gospel, which "fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1); the joy of the Gospel naturally leads to witness and frees us from the risk of a private, gloomy and querulous faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is good to see you living with joy the liberating message of the Gospel. I thank you for this. It is not proselytism – please, never engage in proselytism! – but witness; not a moralism that judges but a mercy that embraces; not superficial piety but love lived out. I encourage you to keep advancing on this path. Like the two blind men in the Gospel, let us ourselves once more encounter Jesus, and come out of ourselves to be fearless witnesses of Jesus to all whom we meet! Let us go forth, carrying the light we have received. Let us go forth to illuminate the night that often surrounds us! We need *enlightened Christians, but above all those who are light-filled*, those who can touch the blindness of our brothers and sisters with tender love and with gestures and words of consolation that kindle the light of hope amid the darkness. Christians who can sow the seeds of the Gospel in the parched fields of everyday life, and bring warmth to the wastelands of suffering and poverty.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus is also passing through the streets of Cyprus, our streets, hearing the cries of our blindness. He wants to touch our eyes, to touch our hearts, and to lead us to the light, to give us spiritual rebirth and new strength. That is what Jesus wants to do. He asks us the same question that he asked the two blind men: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” (*Mt 9:28*). Do we believe that Jesus can do this? Let us renew our faith in him. Let us say to him: Jesus, we believe that your light is greater than our darkness; we believe that you can heal us, that you can renew our fellowship, that you can increase our joy. With the entire Church, let us pray: Come, Lord Jesus! [All repeat: “Come, Lord Jesus!]

### Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am the one who would like to thank *you*, all of you! Tomorrow morning, before leaving the country, I will have occasion to bid farewell to the President of the Republic, here present, but right now I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone for the welcome and affection that you have shown me. Thank you!

Here in Cyprus, I feel something of that atmosphere typical of the Holy Land, where antiquity and the variety of Christian traditions enrich every pilgrim. This is good for me, and it is also encouraging to meet communities of believers who live in the present with hope and openness to the future, and who share this greater vision with those most in need. I think in particular of the migrants in search of a better life, with whom, together with my brothers and sisters of various Christian confessions, I will have my final meeting on this island.

My thanks go to all those who helped to organize this visit! Please pray for me. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady protect you. *Efcharistó!* [Thank you!]

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