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Blessing of the Pallia and Eucharistic Celebration on the Solemnity of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul

At 9.30 on the Solemnity of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis blessed the Pallia, taken from the Confession of the Apostle Peter and destined for the metropolitan archbishops appointed during the course of the year. The Pallium will then be imposed on each metropolitan archbishop by the Pontifical representative in the respective metropolitan see.

After the rite of the blessing of the Pallia, the Pope presided over the Eucharistic celebration with the cardinals, the metropolitan archbishops, and the bishops.

As is customary on the occasion of the Feast of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul, patrons of the City of Rome, the Holy Mass was attended by a delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, led by His Eminence Job, metropolitan archbishop of Pissadia. Archbishop Job was accompanied by His Grace Athenagoras, secretary of the Holy Eparchial Synod of the archdiocese of America, and by the Reverend Kallinikos Chasapis, deacon.

During the Eucharistic Celebration, after the Gospel reading, the Holy Father delivered the following homily:

Homily of the Holy Father

Peter and Paul: two apostles in love with the Lord, two pillars of the faith of the Church. As we reflect on their lives, today's Gospel sets before us the question that Jesus posed to his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (*Mt 16:16*). This is the essential and most important question of all: Who is Jesus for me? Who is Jesus in my life? Let us see how the two apostles answered that question.

Peter's answer can be summed up in one word: *follow*. Peter knew what it was to follow the Lord. On that day in Caesarea Philippi, Peter responded to Jesus' question with a fine profession of faith: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (*Mt 16:16*). An impeccable, precise, exact and, we could even say, perfect "catechetical" answer. Yet that answer was itself the fruit of a journey. For only after the thrilling experience of following the

Lord, walking with him and behind him for some time, did Peter arrive at the spiritual maturity that brought him, by grace, by pure grace, to so clear a profession of faith.

The same evangelist, Matthew, tells us that it all began one day when, beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus walked by, called Peter and his brother Andrew, “and immediately they left their nets and followed him” (*Mt 4:20*). Peter left everything behind to follow the Lord. The Gospel stresses that he did so “immediately”. Peter did not tell Jesus that he would think it over; he didn’t calculate the pros and cons; he didn’t come up with alibis to postpone the decision. Instead, he left his nets and followed Jesus, without demanding any kind of guarantee beforehand. He was to learn everything *day by day*, as a disciple, a follower of Jesus, walking in his footsteps. It is not by chance that in the Gospels the last recorded words of Jesus to Peter were: “Follow me” (*Jn 21:22*). *Follow*.

Peter tells us that it is not enough to respond to the question – “Who is Jesus for me” – with a faultless doctrinal formula or a set of preconceived notions. No. It is only by following the Lord that we come to know him each day, only by becoming his disciples and listening to his words that we become his friends and experience his transforming love. That word “immediately” is also meaningful for us. Many other things can be postponed in life, but not following Jesus; where he is concerned, we cannot hesitate or come up with excuses. We need to be careful, too, because some excuses are disguised as spiritual, as for example when we say, “I am not worthy”, “I don’t have it in me”, “What can I do?” This is one of the devil’s ploys: it robs us of trust in God’s grace by making us think that everything depends on our own abilities.

To detach ourselves from all earthly forms of security, “immediately”, and to follow Jesus anew each day: such is the charge that Peter sets before us today. He invites us to be a “Church that follows”. A Church that strives to be a disciple of the Lord, a lowly servant of the Gospel. Only in this way will the Church be capable of dialoguing with everyone and becoming a place of accompaniment, closeness and hope for the men and women of our time. Only in this way will those farthest from us, those who often regard us with diffidence or indifference, come to realize, in the words of Pope Benedict, that “the Church is the place of our encounter with the Son of the living God and thus the place for our encounter with one another” (*Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent, 10 December 2006*).

We now come to the Apostle of the Gentiles. If the word to describe Peter’s answer was *follow*, for Paul it is *proclaim*, to preach the Gospel. For Paul too, everything began with grace, with the Lord’s prior initiative. On the road to Damascus, as he led a fierce persecution of Christians, barricaded in his religious convictions, the risen Jesus met him and blinded him by his light. Or better, thanks to that light, Paul came to realize how blind he had been: caught up in the pride of his rigid observance, he discovered in Jesus the fulfilment of the mystery of salvation. In comparison with the sublime knowledge of Christ, he came to regard all his former human and religious securities as “rubbish” (cf. *Phil 3:7-8*). Paul then devoted his life to traversing land and sea, cities and towns, heedless of privations and persecutions, for the sake of preaching Jesus Christ. If we look at Paul’s life, it almost seems that the more he preached the Gospel, the more he grew in the knowledge of Jesus. By preaching the Word to others, he was able to peer more deeply into the depths of God’s mystery. Paul could then write: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (*1 Cor 9:16*). He could then confess: “To me, life is Christ” (*Phil 1:21*).

Paul tells us that our answer to the question – “Who is Jesus for me?” – is not a privatized piety that leaves us peaceful and unconcerned about bringing the Gospel to others. The Apostle teaches us that we grow in faith and in knowledge of the mystery of Christ when we preach and bear witness to him before others. This is always the case: *whenever we evangelize, we are ourselves evangelized*. It is an everyday experience: whenever we evangelize, we are ourselves evangelized. The word that we bring to others comes back to us, for however much we give to others, we ourselves receive much more (cf. *Lk 6:38*). This is something necessary also for the Church in our day: to put preaching at the centre, to be a Church that never tires of repeating: “To me, life is Christ” and “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” A Church that needs to preach, even as we need oxygen to breath. A Church that cannot live without sharing with others the embrace of God’s love and the joy of the Gospel.

Brothers and sisters, we are celebrating Peter and Paul. They answered that essential question in life – “Who is

Jesus for me?" – by following him as his disciples and by proclaiming the Gospel. It is good for us to grow as a Church in the same way, by following the Lord, constantly and humbly seeking him out. It is good for us to become a Church that is also outgoing, finding joy not in the things of the world, but in preaching the Gospel before the world and opening people's hearts to the presence of God. Bringing the Lord Jesus everywhere, with humility and joy: in our city of Rome, in our families, in our relationships and our neighbourhoods, in civil society, in the Church, and political life, in the entire world, especially in those places where poverty, decay and marginalization are deeply rooted.

Today, a number of our brother Archbishops receive the Pallium, a sign of communion with the Church of Rome. To them I would say: Be apostles like Peter and Paul. Be disciples in following and apostles in preaching. Bring the beauty of the Gospel everywhere, together with all the People of God. Finally, I would like to address an affectionate greeting to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, sent here by my very dear Brother, His Holiness Bartholomew. Thank you for your presence! Thank you. May we advance together; advance together in following and in preaching the word, as we grow in fraternity. May Peter and Paul accompany us and intercede for us all.
