The Pope celebrates Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and World Day of Consecrated Life

Grace is the antidote to distrust and worldliness

For the Holy Father’s homily, see page 4
Cardinal Urbanī and his relationship with Paul VI

ENZO FANTIN

In remembering Cardinal Giovanni Urbanī, a little more than 50 years after his death (7 September 1969), it is appropriate to dwell on certain significant moments that saw him as a 20th century protagonist of the Italian Church.

First, it must be stated that the recent publication received a disproportionate circulation due to the canonization of Paul VI (after years of almost complete oblivion), without treating the close friendly relations, and even the close collaboration, that the Pontiff had with the Venetian priest born in 1900. This is most clearly shown by the telegram that the Pope sent to the diocese, in which he manifested his affectionate bond with the deceased Cardinal: those words “so dear to me” and the words “L’Osservatore Romano” of 8 September 1969 say more than a long speech.

The contemporaneities, so different in temperament, culture and social background, seemed nevertheless to complement each other in the particular context of the history of the Italian Church during the last century. In addition, those who look further back into their lives immediately notice their commitment to Catholic Action which was destined, thanks to the prompting of the Servant of God Pius XII, to play a decisive role in Italian history tout court. In this sense, Pope Paul VI’s epistolary, scrupulously edited with philological care by the Paul VI Institute, will be decisive; in fact, the anniversary will allow the opening of unpublished documents for consultation. I pointed this out to the President emeritus Giuseppe Camadini, who in a signed letter acted as historian of this ten years ago.

How else could it be explained that at the end of 1946 Urbanī was called to Rome from Venice to be Assistant General of Italian Catholic Action while Montini was in the Secretariat of State? It can no longer be ignored that the future Paul VI depended institutionally on the Venetian cardinal had in the election of the Archbishop of Milan.

Thus, the choice of the Patriarch of Venice as president of the Italian Episcopal Conference was a natural choice at the end of the Council. Also, knowing the fact that as Assistant to Catholic Action – and which were em- phasized by Cardinal Giovanni Colombo in his homily at his funeral in San Marco. Although, it must be added that at times he was not helped by his impetuous and highly emotional character which precluded the natural sympathy he elicited in people.

In his book, “A ogni morte di Papa” (Every time a Pope dies), Giulio Andreotti recalled the episode in Cesena, during the Pacellian years, in which the Assistant declared himself “anticelestial” although very close to the Pope. Here, perhaps he can be considered a forerunner of Pope Francis, who today is fighting against ecclesiastical Pelagianism which has made us forget the true mission of the clergy in the Church. Thus, the appropriate way to remember him is as being inseparably united to the Church rather than to individual ideas.

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That parallel route

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Freedom of heart comes from true poverty

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good Morning.

Today we are examining the first of the eight Beatitudes of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus begins to proclaim his path to happiness with a paradoxical announcement: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3). It is a surprising path and poverty is a strange condition for happiness.

We have to ask ourselves: what does he mean here by the “poor”? If Matthew had only used this word, then the meaning would have been simply economic, that is, it would have meant people who have very little or no means of sustenance and are in need of the help of others.

However, unlike Luke’s, the Gospel of Matthew speaks about “poor in spirit”. What does this mean? According to the Bible, the spirit is the breath of life that makes us human beings, the profound core of our being. Thus, “the poor in spirit” are those who are and who feel poor, mendicants in their intimate being. Jesus proclaims them Blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

How many times have we been told the opposite? You have to be something in life, be someone... One must make a name for oneself... Loneliness and unhappiness stem from this: if I have to be “someone”, then I am in competition with others and I worry excessively about my ego. If I do not accept being poor, I hate everything that reminds me of my fragility. Because this fragility prevents me from becoming an important person, someone who is rich, not only moneyside, even well-known: everything.

Before oneself, everyone knows well that, as much as one does one’s best, he/she remains radically incomplete and vulnerable. There is no trick to cover up this vulnerability. Each of us is vulnerable inside. One has to see where. But how trying life is if one does not accept one’s limitations! Life is hard. One lives poorly. One does not digest the limitation; [yet] it is there. Proud people do not ask for help. They cannot ask for help. It does not come easily to them to ask for help because they have to appear self-sufficient. And how many of them do need help, but their pride prevents them from asking for help? And how difficult it is to admit a mistake and ask for forgiveness! When I offer advice to newlyweds who ask me how to live their marriage well, I tell them: “There are three magic words: may I, thank you, I am sorry”. They are words that come from poverty in spirit. One must not be intrusive but rather say excuse me: “Do you think it is good to do this?”, so there can be dialogue in the family, spouses are in dialogue. “You did this for me, thank you I needed it”. We always make mistakes, one slips: “I am sorry”. And usually couples, newlyweds those who are here and are numerous tell me: “The third one is the hardest”, saying sorry, asking for forgiveness. Because proud people cannot say they are sorry: they are always right. They are not poor in spirit. The Lord instead, never grows tired of forgiving. Unfortunately, it is we who get tired of asking for forgiveness (cf. Angeli, 17 March 2013). The tiredness of asking for forgiveness. This is a bad state!

Why is it difficult to ask for forgiveness? Because it humiliates our hypocritical image. And yet, constantly seeking to hide one’s weaknesses is tiring and distressing. Jesus Christ tells us: being poor is an opportunity for grace; and he shows us the way out from this difficulty. We are given the right to be poor in spirit because this is the path to the Kingdom of God.

But a fundamental thing must be mentioned: we do not have to transform ourselves to become poor in spirit. We do not have to undergo any transformation because we already are! We are poor... or more clearly: we are “wretched” in spirit! We are in need of everything. We are all poor in spirit, we are beggars. It is the human condition.

The Kingdom of God is of the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world: they have goods and comforts. But they are kingdoms that end. The power of men and women, even of the greatest empires, pass and disappear. Often we see on the television news or in newspapers that that strong, powerful leader or that government that existed yesterday and no longer exists today, has fallen. The wealth of this world fades away and so does money. The elderly used to teach us that shrudocks have no pockets. It is true. Never saw a removal truck behind a funeral procession: no one takes anything with them. This wealth stays here.

The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world, they have goods and comforts. But we know how they end. Only those who know how to love what is truly good more than themselves, reign. And this is the power of God.

In what way did Christ show his power? It was by doing what the kings of the earth do not do: give his life for mankind. And this is true power. The power of fraternity, the power of charity, the power of love, the power of humility. This is what Christ did.

Herein lies true freedom: those who have this power of humility, of service, of fraternity are free. The poverty praised in the Beatitudes is at the service of this freedom.

Because there is a poverty that we have to accept, that of being alive, and a poverty that instead we have to seek, the practical one, in the things of this world, in order to be free and to be able to love. We should always seek freedom of the heart, the freedom that has its roots in our own poverty.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, Australia, Vietnam and the United States of America. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Lastly, I greet young people, the elderly, the sick and wounded. May the Lord support with his grace, the goal of building up the Church through our sacrifices, overcoming our egotism and placing ourselves at the service of the Gospel.
The Pope celebrates Mass for the Presentation of the Lord and consecrated life in Saint Peter's Basilica

Grace is the antecedent to distrust and worldliness

"Whoever experiences God's grace where all else can discover the antidote to distrust and worldliness, there is no worldliness worldwide". Pope Francis offered these words during his homily in Saint Peter's Basilica on Saturday afternoon, 1 February, on the occasion of the Presentation of the Lord and the feast of World Day of Consecrated Life. The following is the English text of his reflection.

"My eyes have seen your salvation" (Lk 1:52). These are the words of Simeon, whom the Gospel presents as a simple man "righteous and devout", says the text (Lk 2:25). But among all the living beings on that day, he alone "saw Jesus as the Saviour. What did he see? A child, a vulnerable, simple child. But in him see salvation, for the Holy Spirit allowed him to recognize in that toddler newborn "the Lord's Christ" (Lk 2:28-29). "This is my salvation" he said, "in the Lord's Christ, in whom do I turn my gaze: to the Lord, the One who has come to serve, not to be served by us" (cf. Lk 2:32).

Perceptive and sensitive, Simeon, to Jesus' invitation to follow him, becomes discerning and predisposed to find in the Lord a reason for his joy, for his vocation. The Lord, and the Lord and the Lord and the Lord and the Lord, whom the Gospel presents to us today, is the starting point. Looking back, recalling the story and evaluating what we have experienced, the Lord is the starting point. The way that leads us to an understanding of the experience of "first love" (cf. Hos 2:9), prompts me to say: Lord, let your servant depart in peace (Lk 2:26). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to save. They do not wait for others to take initiatives, but go out to meet those who are isolated and marginalized, for the sake of the people. They adopt the "passion" that is the language of people in love, as consecrated life is to undertake a path of consecration, a path towards a more meaningful life.

Simeon and Mary realize that gratitude is not enough to think about the aesthetic of consecrated life, if it were a museum piece, but rather to become "collectors" of moments as for the Lord, it perceives beauty. It is the way of consecrated life: contagious joy, strong attraction, over both the reality of life, nor yet seeing a new path in one's own situation. When we keep our poverty, we are often unaware, thus giving rise to the experience of "first love" (cf. Hos 2:9), prompts me to say: Lord, let your servant depart in peace (Lk 2:26). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to save. They do not wait for others to take initiatives, but go out to meet those who are isolated and marginalized, for the sake of the people. They adopt the "passion" that is the language of people in love, as consecrated life is to undertake a path of consecration, a path towards a more meaningful life.

Amazement and wonder are the first steps towards reflection and contemplation. They install the mind, touch hearts and move feet, surprise a reply, but also and I would say first and foremost, to the possibilities that this form of consecrated life currently faces, some are more urgent than others, so the first thing that is said of consecrated people is discernment, so the priority can be given to one rather than another. It is a fundamental methodological issue that not all the challenges can be faced in the same way, nor can all of them be invested with the same strength and energy. This too, the Holy Father's constant call to consecrated life and the Church herself is very vital, the need to relate to what is essential, the need to return to the Gospel.

"The one who has come to serve, not to be served" is the experience of God who remains ever young. In this way amazement and wonder are the antennas to receive and upon them open the way to new experiences. Without amazement and wonder, the relationship with the Lord in consecrated life could come to a stalemate and so that it may continue to be meaningful in today's world, at an alternative way of life that is offered by the world and by the dominant culture, and all things considered, so that there is no reason for us to be often unaware, thus giving rise to the experience of "first love" (cf. Hos 2:9), prompts me to say: Lord, let your servant depart in peace (Lk 2:26). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to save. They do not wait for others to take initiatives, but go out to meet those who are isolated and marginalized, for the sake of the people. They adopt the "passion" that is the language of people in love, as consecrated life is to undertake a path of consecration, a path towards a more meaningful life.

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A new page in the dialogue among religions

Tuesday, 4 February, marked one year since the signing by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, in Abu Dhabi. To commemorate the anniversary, government leaders, religious leaders, representatives of international organizations as well as members of the “Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Document on Human Fraternity” gathered in Abu Dhabi.

Among the events organized to commemorate the anniversary were several working groups and encounters – including video messages from the two signatories – which were attended by people united by their commitment to human fraternity such as: the Secretary of the Higher Committee, Egyptian Judge Abdo Alazab, the Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Paolo Ruffini, praised the many speakers whom he said helped explain how “principles can be transformed into behaviour. For example, I found particularly interesting the subject of micro-credit addressed by the Pakistani Maham Ali Sajjad who said that with it, one can find a way to give trust to people who are normally discarded by the economic system”. The aim of the Perfect continued, “is not to create a ‘super religion’ to unite all religions but rather to understand that, by maintaining the identification with the Abrahamic House, and for the presentation of the Human Fraternity Award. I am therefore pleased to be able to participate in the presentation to the world of the International Human Fraternity Award, in hopes of encouraging all virtuous exemplars of men and women who in this world embody love through actions and sacrifices made for the good of others, no matter how different they may be in religion, ethnic and cultural affiliation. And I ask Almighty God to bless every effort that benefits the good of humanity and helps us to move forward in fraternity. Thank you.”

Celebration in Abu Dhabi one year later

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Grace is the antidote to distrust

They were aged eyes, but burning with hope. The gaze of consecrated men and women can only be one of hope. Knowing how to hope. Looking around, it is easy to lose hope: things that don’t work, the decline in vocations. There is always the temptation to have a worldly gaze, one devoid of hope. But let us look to the Gospel and see Simeon and Anna: they were elderly, alone, yet they had not lost hope, because they remained in communion with the Lord. Anna “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (v. 37). Here is the secret: never to alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope. We become blind if we do not look to the Lord every day, if we do not adore him. To adore the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to see grace, how to look for one’s neighbour, how to hope. Then our eyes too will see salvation.

Challenges to consecrated life

where you live, by welcoming brothers and sisters in their poverty, as Simeon welcomed Jesus meek and poor. Today, so many see in other people only hindrances and complications. We need to have a gaze that does notคอนสัน, but encourages, frees, consoles; a gaze of compassion, a gaze of consecrated men and women.

A year ago, my brother, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyib, and I signed a document on human fraternity in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi. Today we celebrate the first anniversary of this great humanitarian event, as we hope for better humanity, a future free from hatred, racism, extremism, and terrorism, in which the values of peace, love and fraternity prevail.

Today, on this first anniversary, I express my appreciation for the support offered by the United Arab Emirates for the work of the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity. I thank you for the initiative led by His Highness the Abrahamic House, and for the presentation of the Human Fraternity Award.

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Old Age is not an illness but a privilege

Pope at an international congress on the richness of life

Old age is not "an illness" but rather a "privilege," Pope Francis highlighted during an address to attendees of the international congress on “The richness of many years of life,” whom he received in audience in the Sala Regia on Friday morning, 31 January. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s remarks which he delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially welcome you, participants in the first International Congress on the Pastoral Care of the Elderly, entitled, “The richness of many years,” organized by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, and I thank Cardinal Farrell for his kind words.

The "richness of many years" is a richness of people, of each individual person who has many years of life, experience and history behind them. It is the precious treasure that takes form in the life journey of each man and woman, whatever their origin, provenance, and economic or social condition. Life is a gift, and when it is long it is a privilege, for each one and for others. Always, it is always so.

In the 21st century, old age has become one of the distinctive features of humanity. Over a span of just a few decades, the demographic pyramid which was once based on a large number of children and young people had at the top just a few elderly people—has been reversed. If once the elderly could have populated a small state, nowadays they could populate an entire continent. In this regard, the enormous number of elderly people constitutes a novelty for every social and geographic environment worldwide. In addition, the different seasons of life culminate in old age: for many, it is the stage in which productive effort ceases, strength declines and the signs of illness, the need for help, and social withdrawal appear; but for many it is the beginning of a long period of psycho-physical well-being and freedom from work commitments.

In both situations, how should these years be lived? What meaning can be given to this phase of life, which for many people may be long? Social disorientation and, in many respects, the indifference and rejection that our societies manifest towards the elderly demand not only of the Church, but of all of us, a serious reflection to learn to grasp and to appreciate the value of old age. Indeed, while on the one hand States are called to confront the new demographic situation at the economic level, on the other, civil society needs values and meaning for the third and fourth senior stages. And here, above all, is where the ecclesial community can contribute.

That is why I welcomed with interest the initiative of this congress, which focused its attention on pastoral care for the elderly and initiated a reflection on the implications of a substantial presence of grandparents in our parishes and societies. I ask that this does not remain an isolated initiative, but that it instead mark the beginning of a journey of pastoral exploration and discernment. We need to change our pastoral habits in order to respond to the presence of so many older people in families and communities.

In the Bible, longevity is a blessing. It confronts us with our fragility, with our mutual dependence, with our family and community ties, and above all with our divine sonship. In granting old age, God the Father gives us time to deepen our knowledge of him, our intimacy with him, to enter ever more into his heart and to surrender ourselves to him. This is the time to prepare ourselves to deliver our spirit into his hands, definitively, with child-like trust. But it is also a time of renewed fruitfulness. "They shall bring forth fruit in old age," says the psalmist (Ps 90:14). God's plan of salvation, in fact, is also carried out in the poverty of weak, sterile and powerless bodies. From the barren wombs of Sarah and the centenarian body of Abraham the Chosen People was born (cf. Rom 4:18-20). From Elizabeth and the aged Zechariah, John the Baptist was born.

The elderly person, even when weak, can become an instrument of the history of salvation. Aware of this irreplaceable role of the elderly, the Church becomes a place where generations are called to share in God’s plan of love, in a relationship of the mutual exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This intergenerational sharing obliges us to consider older people differently, to learn to look to the future together with them.

When we think of the elderly and talk about them, especially in the pastoral dimension, we must learn to alter the tenses of verbs a little. There is not only the past, as if, for the elderly, there were only a life behind them and a murky archive. No. The Lord can and wants to write with them also new pages, pages of holiness, of service, of prayer... Today I wish to tell you that the elderly are also the present and the future of the Church. Yes, they are also the future of a Church that, together with the young, prophesies and dreams! This is why it is so important that those advanced in years and the young speak to each other, it is so important.

The prophecy of the elderly is taken place when the light of the Gospel enters fully into their lives; when, like Simeon and Anne, they take Jesus in their arms and announce the revolution of tenderness, the Good News of the One who came into the world to bring the light of the Father. That is why I ask you not to spare yourselves in proclaiming the Gospel to grandparents and the elderly. Go to them with a smile on your lips and the Gospel in your hands. Go out into the streets of your parishes and seek out the elderly who live alone. Old age is not an illness, it is a privilege! Loneliness can be an illness, but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort we can heal it.

God has a large population of grandparents throughout the world. Nowadays, in secularized societies in many countries, parents do not have, for the most part, the Christian formation and living faith that the grandparents have which they can pass on to their grandchildren. They are the indispensable link in educating children and young people in the faith. We must get used to including them in our pastoral horizons and to considering them, in a non-episodic way, as one of the vital components of our communities. They are not only people whom we are called to safeguard. They can be the protagonist of a pastoral evangelizing ministry, privileged witnesses of God’s faithful love.

For this I thank all of you who dedicate your pastoral energy to grandparents and the elderly. I know well that your commitment and your reflection are born of real friendship with many elderly people. I hope that what is today the sensitivity of the few will become the patrimony of every ecclesial community. Do not be afraid, take initiatives, help your bishops and your dioceses to promote the pastoral service to and with older people. Do not be discouraged, keep going! The Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life will continue to be at your side in this task.

I too accompany you with my prayer and my blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
Safeguard and protect life from its very beginning to its natural end

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good Morning,

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord: when the infant Jesus was presented in the Temple by the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Today is also World Day of Consecrated Life which recalls the great treasure in the Church of those who follow the Lord assiduously, by professing the evangelical counsels.

The evangelist Luke describes all four of them in a twofold attitude: the attitude of movement and the attitude of wonder. The fist attitude is movement. Mary and Joseph head towards Jerusalem: meanwhile, moved by the Spirit, Simeon goes to the Temple, while Anna tirelessly serves God day and night. In this way the four protagonists of the Gospel passage show us that Christian life requires dynamism, and it requires a willingness to walk, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide one. Immobility suits neither Christian witness nor the Church’s mission. The world needs Christians who allow themselves to be moved, who do not tire of walking on life’s streets, to bring the comforting Word of Jesus to everyone. Every baptized person has received the vocation to proclaim — to proclaim something, to proclaim Jesus — to proclaim — to proclaim — to proclaim — to proclaim.

The second attitude with which Saint Luke presents the four protagonists in the narrative is wonder. Mary and Joseph: “marvelled at what was said about him” (v. 35). Wonder is also an explicit reaction of the aged Simeon, who sees with his own eyes in the Child Jesus the redemption of God for his people: that redemption which he had awaited for years. And the same is true of Anna who “gave thanks to God” (v. 38) and went about pointing Jesus out to the people. She was a saintly chatterbox. She talked out to the people. She was a saintly chatterbox. She talked out to the people. She was a saintly chatterbox. She talked out to the people. She was a saintly chatterbox. She talked out to the people.

Brothers and sisters, always [be] on the move and open to wonder!

May the Virgin Mary help us to contemplate every day in Jesus, God’s gift to us, and to allow ourselves to be engaged by him in the movement of the gift with joyful wonder so that our whole life may become a praise to God in the service to our brothers and sisters.

After reciting the Marian prayer, the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, in Italy today, we are celebrating Pro-Life Day whose theme is “Open the doors to life”. I join in the Bishops’ message and I hope that this day may be an opportunity to renew the commitment to safeguard and protect human life, from its beginning to its natural end. Moreover, it is necessary to oppose every form of violation of dignity, even when technology or the economy are at stake, opening wide the doors to new forms of sympathetic fraternal solidarity. Today, on the Day of Consecrated Life, I would like all of us together in the Square to pray for consecrated people who work so hard, often in a hidden manner. Let us pray together. [Hail Mary]. And a round of applause for consecrated people. I greet you all, people of Rome and pilgrims. In particular I greet the students from Badajoz, Spain; the faithful from Cisminoa, Spoleto, Fano, Palau and Roseto degli Abruzzi. I see that there are many Polish pilgrims. And Japanese pilgrims. Let us greet them too.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday. And please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch.

Arrivederci!