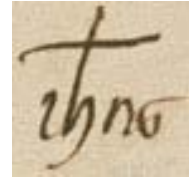


General Congregation 35



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Rome, January 21 2008, n. 6 (attachment)

**FR. GENERAL'S HOMILY, GESÙ CHURCH,
SUNDAY 20 JAN 2008.
MASS ON THANKSGIVING.**

Above all I would like to say that this is not a message for the whole world. Rather, it is merely a simple homily; a prayerful reflection of today's readings for us Jesuits who are here this afternoon.

The first reading taken from the prophet Isaiah briefly describes to us Christians our mission in the world. The prophet Isaiah tells us that we have all been called to serve, that we are here precisely to serve. It is a clear message regarding our mission as Jesuits, as Christians, as the people of God. God has made us servants and, in so doing, God finds delight. The Spanish version of this first reading says that God is proud of the servant, while the Italian version says that God "is satisfied". I believe the latter is closer to what the Bible wants to say. The more we become as servants, the more pleased God is. I think this is an image we should all take home today.

Newspapers and magazines these past few days have been toying with a number of clichés, namely, the Black Pope, the White Pope, power, gatherings, discussions...But it is all so superficial, so artificial! These are but crumbs for those who love politics, but they are not for us.

The prophet Isaiah says that serving pleases the Lord. To serve is what counts: to serve the Church, the world, our fellow men and women, and the Gospel. Saint Ignatius also has written in summary form about our life: in all things to love and to serve. And our pope, Holy Father Benedict XVI, has reminded us that God is love; he has reminded us of the Gospel's essence.

Later on the prophet Isaiah describes the servant's strength. God is the servant's only strength. We do not have any other source of strength: not the external strength found in politics, in business, in the media, in studies, in titles, nor the internal fortitude found in research. Only God. Exactly like the poor. Not too long ago I spoke to one of you regarding something that happened to me while working with immigrants. It was an experience that deeply affected me. A Filipino woman who had experienced many difficulties adapting to the Japanese society, a woman who had suffered a great deal, was asked by another Filipino woman for advice. The second woman said, "I have many problems with my husband and I do not know if I should get divorced or try to save my

marriage...” In other words, she wanted advice concerning a rather common problem. The first woman replied, “I do not know what advice to give you right now. However, come with me to Church so that the two of us can pray because only God really helps the poor.” This statement deeply touched me because it is so true. The poor only have God in whom to find their strength. For us only God is our strength. Unconditional, disinterested service finds its source of strength only in God.

The prophet Isaiah continues today’s first reading by speaking about salvation. Our message is a message about salvation. A bit later he stresses what has most caught my eye about this reading, namely, that our God, our faith, our message, and our salvation are so great that they cannot be enclosed within a container, in any one group or community, regardless of whether or not the group in question happens to be a religious community. What is at stake is the Good News of salvation for all nations. It is a universal message because the message itself is enormous; a message that in itself is irreducible.

All represented nations are gathered here today. All, everyone, is represented here. However, nations continue to open up. I ask myself today which are those “nations”. Indeed, all geographic nations are here today. However, there may be other nations, other non-geographic communities, human communities, that claim our aid: the poor, the marginalized, the excluded. In this globalized world of ours the number of those excluded by all is increasing. Those excluded are diminished, since our society only has room for the big and not the small. All those who are disadvantaged, manipulated, all of these, may perhaps be for us those “nations”: The nations that need the prophetic message of God.

Yesterday after the election, after the first shock, there came the moment of fraternal aid. All of you have greeted me very affectionately, offering your support and help. One of you whispered to me: “Don’t forget the poor!”. Perhaps this is the most important greeting of all, just as Paul turns to the wealthier churches of his time requesting aid for the poor of Jerusalem. Don’t forget the poor: These are our “nations”. These are the nations for whom salvation is still a dream, a wish. Perhaps it may be in their midst, but they don’t realize it.

And the others? The others are our collaborators, if they share our same perspective, if they have the same heart Christ has given us. And if they have a bigger heart and an even greater vision, then we are their collaborators. What counts is salvation, the joy of the poor. What counts, what is real, is hope, salvation. And we want that this salvation be an explosion of salvation that reaches out everywhere. This is what the prophet Isaiah is talking about: That salvation may reach and touch everyone. A salvation according to God’s heart, will, Spirit.

We go on with our General Congregation. Perhaps this is what we need to discern. In this moment of our history where do we need to fix our attention, our service, our energy. Or, in other words, what is the color, the tone, the image of salvation today for those many people who are in need of it, those human non-geographic nations that demand salvation. There are many who wait for a salvation that we have yet to understand. To open ourselves up to this reality is the challenge, the call, of the moment.

And we turn to the Gospel. This is how we can be true disciples of the Lamb of God, He who takes away our sins and leads us to a new world. And He, the Lamb of God, has shown himself as Servant, he who fulfills Isaiah’s prophecies, the message of the Prophets. His identity as Servant will be his sign, the mark of our own mission, of the call which we try to respond to these days.

Let us pray together for this sense of Mission of the Church, that it may be for the “nations’ ” benefit and not our own. The “nations” that are still far away, not geographically, but humanly, existentially. That the joy and the hope that come from the Gospel be a reality with which we can work little by little, doing it with a lot of love and disinterested service.