

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MEETING BETWEEN POPE PAUL VI AND PATRIARCH
ATHENAGORAS IN JERUSALEM
(24-26 MAY 2014)

MEETING WITH PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

*Church of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives (Jerusalem)
Monday, 26 May 2014*

Video

"He came out and went... to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him" (*Lk 22:39*).

At the hour which God had appointed to save humanity from its enslavement to sin, Jesus came here, to Gethsemane, to the foot of the Mount of Olives. We now find ourselves in this holy place, a place sanctified by the prayer of Jesus, by his agony, by his sweating of blood, and above all by his "yes" to the loving will of the Father. We dread in some sense to approach what Jesus went through at that hour; we tread softly as we enter that inner space where the destiny of the world was decided.

In that hour, Jesus felt the need to pray and to have with him his disciples, his friends, those who had followed him and shared most closely in his mission. But here, at Gethsemane, following him became difficult and uncertain; they were overcome by doubt, weariness and fright. As the events of Jesus' passion rapidly unfolded, the disciples would adopt different attitudes before the Master: attitudes of closeness, distance, hesitation.

Here, in this place, each of us – bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and seminarians – might do well to ask: Who am I, before the sufferings of my Lord?

Am I among those who, when Jesus asks them to keep watch with him, fall asleep instead, and rather than praying, seek to escape, refusing to face reality?

Or do I see myself in those who fled out of fear, who abandoned the Master at the most tragic hour in his earthly life?

Is there perhaps duplicity in me, like that of the one who sold our Lord for thirty pieces of silver, who was once called Jesus' "friend", and yet ended up by betraying him?

Do I see myself in those who drew back and denied him, like Peter? Shortly before, he had promised Jesus that he would follow him even unto death (cf. *Lk 22:33*); but then, put to the test and assailed by fear, he swore he did not know him.

Am I like those who began planning to go about their lives without him, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, foolish and slow of heart to believe the words of the prophets (cf. *Lk 24:25*)?

Or, thanks be to God, do I find myself among those who remained faithful to the end, like the Virgin Mary and the Apostle John? On Golgotha, when everything seemed bleak and all hope seemed pointless, only love proved stronger than death. The love of the Mother and the beloved disciple made them stay at the foot of the Cross, sharing in the pain of Jesus, to the very end.

Do I recognize myself in those who imitated their Master to the point of martyrdom, testifying that he was everything to them, the incomparable strength sustaining their mission and the ultimate horizon of their lives?

Jesus' friendship with us, his faithfulness and his mercy, are a priceless gift which encourages us to follow him trustingly, notwithstanding our failures, our mistakes, also our betrayals.

But the Lord's goodness does not dispense us from the need for vigilance before the Tempter, before sin, before the evil and the betrayal which can enter even into the religious and priestly life. We are all exposed to sin, to evil, to betrayal. We are fully conscious of the disproportion between the grandeur of God's call and of our littleness, between the sublimity of the mission and the reality of our human weakness. Yet the Lord in his great goodness and his infinite mercy always takes us by the hand lest we drown in the sea of our fears and anxieties. He is ever at our side, he never abandons us. And so, let us not be overwhelmed by fear or

disheartened, but with courage and confidence let us press forward in our journey and in our mission.

You, dear brothers and sisters, are called to follow the Lord with joy in this holy land! It is a gift and also a responsibility. Your presence here is extremely important; the whole Church is grateful to you and she sustains you by her prayers. From this holy place, I wish to extend my heartfelt greetings to all Christians in Jerusalem: I would like to assure them that I remember them affectionately and that I pray for them, being well aware of the difficulties they experience in this city. I urge them to be courageous witnesses of the passion of the Lord but also of his resurrection, with joy and hope.

Let us imitate the Virgin Mary and Saint John, and stand by all those crosses where Jesus continues to be crucified. This is how the Lord calls us to follow him: this is the path, there is no other!

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (*Jn 12:26*).