



(ZENIT, Vatican City, June 15, 2016).- Here is a ZENIT translation of the address Pope Francis gave during this morning's general audience in St. Peter's Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

One day, drawing near to the city of Jericho, Jesus wrought the miracle of returning sight to a blind man who was begging on the roadside (cf. *Luke 18:35-43*). Today we want to discern the meaning of this sign, because it also touches us directly. The evangelist Luke says the blind man was sitting by the roadside begging (cf. v. 35). A blind man at that time – but also up to not too long ago – could only live from alms. The figure of this blind man represents many persons who, also today, find themselves marginalized because of a physical or other sort of disadvantage. He is separated from the crowd; he is sitting there while busy people pass by, absorbed in their own thoughts and in many things ... And the road, which could be a place of encounter, is for him, instead, a place of solitude. Such a crowd passes by ... and he is alone.

The image of a marginalized individual is sad, especially in the background of the city of Jericho, the splendid and luxuriant oasis in the desert. We know, in fact, that it was Jericho that the people of Israel reached at the end of their long exodus from Egypt: that city represents the entrance door to the Promised Land. We recall the words that Moses pronounced in that circumstance: "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, *you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand* against your poor brother *For the poor will never cease out of the land*; therefore, I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (*Deuteronomy 15:7.11*). The contrast between this recommendation of

God's Law and the situation described in the Gospel is striking: while the blind man cried out, invoking Jesus, people rebuked him to silence him, as if he didn't have the right to speak. They had no compassion for him; instead, his shouting annoyed them. How often we are annoyed, when we see so many people on the road – needy, sick people who have nothing to eat. How often we are annoyed when we find ourselves before so many refugees. It's a temptation we all have – I too! It's because of this that the Word of God admonishes us, reminding us that indifference and hostility render us blind and deaf, they impede our seeing our brothers and do not allow us to recognize the Lord in them – indifference and hostility. And sometimes this indifference and hostility become also aggression and insult: “but throw all these out!”; “put them somewhere else!” This aggression is what the people did when the blind man cried out: but you, go away, go on, don't speak, don't shout.”

We note an interesting particular. The evangelist says that someone in the crowd explained to the blind man the reason all those people had gathered, saying: “*Jesus of Nazareth is passing by!*” (v. 37). Jesus' passing by is indicated with the same verb with which the Book of Exodus speaks of the passing of the exterminating Angel, who saves the Israelites in the land of Egypt (cf. *Exodus* 12:23). It is the “passing” of Easter, the beginning of the liberation: when Jesus passes by there is always liberation, there is always salvation! Therefore, for the blind man, it was as if *his Easter* was announced. Without allowing himself to be intimidated, the blind man cries out more times to Jesus, recognizing Him as the Son of David, the awaited Messiah that, according to the prophet Isaiah, opened the eyes of the blind (cf. *Isaiah* 35:5). In contrast to the crowd, this blind man sees with the eyes of faith. Thanks to it, his supplication has a powerful efficacy. In fact, on hearing him, “Jesus stopped, and commanded that he be brought to Him” (v. 40). By doing so, Jesus “*takes the blind man away from the roadside* and puts him at the center of the attention of His disciples and of the crowd. We also think <of the times> when we have been in awful situations, including situations of sin, how it was in fact Jesus who took us by the hand away from the roadside and gave us salvation. Realized thus is a twofold passage. First: the people had proclaimed good news to the blind man, but they didn't want to have anything to do with him; now Jesus obliges them all to be aware that the good news implies putting at the center of one's path the one who was excluded from it. Second: in his turn, the blind man could not see, but his faith opened the way of salvation, and he finds himself amidst all those who had stopped on the road to see Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, *the Lord's passing is an encounter of mercy that unites everything around Him to enable us to recognize one who is in need of help*

and of consolation. Jesus also passes by in your Life; and when Jesus passes, and I realize it, it is an invitation to draw near to Him, to be better, to be a better Christian, to follow Jesus.

Jesus turns to the blind man and asks him: “*What do you want me to do for you?*”(v. 41). These words of Jesus are striking: the Son of God is now before the blind man as a humble servant. He, Jesus, God, says: “But what do you want me to do for you? How do you want me to serve you?” God makes Himself a servant of the sinful man. And the blind man answers Jesus, no longer calling him “Son of David,” but “*Lord,*” the title that since the beginning the Church has applied to the Risen Jesus. The blind man asks that he might see again, and his desire is heard: “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well” (v. 42). He showed his faith invoking Jesus and wanting absolutely to meet Him, and this brought him the gift of salvation. Thanks to his faith, he can now see and, above all, *he feels that he is loved by Jesus.*

Therefore, the account ends by stating that the blind man “followed Him, glorifying God” (v. 43): *he becomes a disciple.* From a beggar to a disciple: this is also our path. We are all beggars, all of us. We are always in need of salvation. And all of us, should take this step every day: from beggars to disciples. And so, the blind man sets out behind the Lord and begins to be part of His community. He whom they wanted to silence, now witnesses in a loud voice his encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, and “all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God” (v. 43). A second miracle happens: what happened to the blind man *makes it so that the people also finally see.* The same light illumines them all, uniting them in a prayer of praise. So Jesus pours out His mercy upon all those He meets: He calls them, brings them to come to Him, gathers them, heals and enlightens them, creating a new people that celebrates the wonders of His merciful love. Let us also allow ourselves to be called by Jesus, and let us be healed by Jesus, forgiven by Jesus, and let us go behind Jesus praising God. So be it!

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

Greeting in Italian

<I give> a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I am happy to receive the new priests of the Diocese of Brescia and the seminarians of the Focolare Movement. I exhort you to be ever more conformed to Christ the Good Shepherd, witnessing His merciful heart.

I greet the faithful of some Italian dioceses, accompanied by their respective Pastors: Albenga-Imperia, Carpi, Chioggia, Oristano, Saluzzo and San Miniato.

I wish you a Jubilee pilgrimage rich in spiritual fruits for your good and for that of your ecclesial communities.

A particular greeting goes to young people, the sick and newlyweds. Dear young people, especially you youngsters of the *Youthful Epicenter* of San Severo and those of the *Penal Institute* of Airola, may the Lord be your interior Teacher who guides you constantly on the ways of goodness. Dear sick, offer your suffering to Christ crucified to cooperate in the redemption of the world. And you, dear newlyweds, be aware of the irreplaceable mission of love to which your marriage commits you.

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