

Rite of Beatification of the Venerable Servant of God Francis Mary of the Cross

HOMILY BY CARDINAL VICAR ANGELO DE DONATIS

Basilica of St John in the Lateran

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our diocesan community of Rome, which since the time of the Apostles has been the cradle of so many personalities of holiness, is once again celebrating today, because a new star has come to illuminate the sky and join the ranks of the blessed. Francis of the Cross Jordan can rightly be considered a son of the Church of Rome: here he spent his formative years; here he received the founding charism as a gift from the Spirit, which inspired him to establish the original Apostolic Society on 8 December 1881, in Piazza Farnese. Here, in Via della Conciliazione, lie his mortal remains. Today, here, where it all began, in the city of Peter and Paul, where the Society took its first steps, he is beatified! The Church recognises that he was transfigured in the death and resurrection of Christ and now lives in him among the blessed. Francis of the Cross lives in Christ!

From the tapestry that the Liturgy of the Word has just woven in our ears and hearts, I would like to extract three threads that we can contemplate at greater length and that also characterised the life of Blessed Father Francis Jordan, to the point of making him an icon of the Risen Lord. In this way, the charism aroused in him by the Spirit helps us to better understand the richness of the Word that has resounded in our midst.

The first thread is precisely meditating on the Scripture. The seed of the apostolic vocation of Blessed Francis of the Cross germinated through the study and meditation of the Word. Among his personal resolutions, collected in his spiritual diary, he wrote: *Read the Scripture often!* This is a recommendation he addresses to himself, because for him the Bible is the source from which he draws the contents of his religious formation. He understood that only from the Word of God can one receive that light *which enlightens those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death* (Lk 1:79). Only by *frequenting* the Scriptures, reading them, meditating on them, one can acquire the spiritual wisdom necessary to proclaim the Word. Francis of the Cross feels in his heart that he is called to found an apostolic work and understands that only listening to the Word of God can be the foundation of the path of evangelisation. In Scripture, the Spirit reveals to us that the Father has saved us, and not because of any righteous works we have done, but because of his mercy, as we heard in the second reading, taken from the letter to Titus.

Pope Francis reminded us of this in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. The whole work of evangelisation must be nourished by the Word of God,

it has to be based on it. The Word has to be listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. Sacred Scripture is the source of evangelisation. It is there that the love story between God and his people is understood and described. Therefore, one must be continually formed to listen to the Word. The Church does not evangelise if it does not allow itself to be continually evangelised. It is indispensable that the Word of God should increasingly become the heart of every ecclesiastical activity. Dear sisters and brothers, one cannot bear witness to the good news without nourishing oneself with the Word.

The second thread that we take for our meditation is the one that - in my opinion - constitutes the synthesis of the missionary work of Blessed Francis of the Cross, which we could formulate as follows: to announce to all, in order to save all.

To proclaim and to save are two verbs that recur many times in the texts of Blessed Francis. He continually took to his heart those who could not walk the path of the Gospel because of lack of religious instruction and formation. Evangelisation became day after day the main objective of his life and mission, and today, it has become the mission of the Salvatorian family. Father Jordan found in the Apostle Paul a model of his apostolic zeal, a guide, a teacher; he let himself be touched so deeply by the tireless action of the Apostle's proclamation that he experienced in his heart the desire *to save all, like a burning fire and a flaming torch, which always burns with vehement love towards God and enflames everyone*. The first reading we heard - chapter 18 of Acts - describes the experience of the *Apostle to the Gentiles* as he travelled through Galatia and Phrygia confirming everyone in the faith. It tells of Priscilla and Aquila who accurately explain the way of God to the Jew named Apollos. It is the story of the first vital pulsations of the Church; a story that continues down to us, sustained and nourished by the loving charity of so many witnesses, known or hidden, who dedicated their lives to proclaim to all and save all, as Francis of the Cross did and as he taught his own to do. This is the relevance of our Blessed. Here is the distinctiveness of his example!

A few years ago, when speaking of the new evangelisation Pope Francis reminded us how important it is to feel challenged by the questions of today's men and women,. To proclaim today is to share words of life without claiming to have immediate answers and without giving pre-packaged answers; it is to leave room for the creative power of the Holy Spirit, who frees the heart from the slavery that oppresses it and renews it. (cf. Address of the Holy Father Francis to participants at the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, 21 September 2019). Thus, the proclamation of the Word reaches everyone because it touches the heart, makes existence vibrate with meaning and fills the emptiness that sometimes risks absorbing people in our society.

The time in which we live needs proclamation of love, it needs to know and hear that God loves us, first of all, forever, by his own choice. It needs a perspective of salvation,

a gaze towards heaven, towards eternity, to overcome emptiness, boredom, apathy, indifference, superficiality and to experience God's love in our eyes, in our actions, in our words. We will only be credible witnesses of the Risen if we live as resurrected, with Paradise as our horizon!

The third thread I propose to you is apostolic communion, the unity we are called to witness in life, as Paul recommends in his letter to Titus.

In every Eucharistic celebration, after the invocation of the Spirit over the bread and wine, there is a second request for the intervention of the Holy Pneuma, which the Church describes with a Greek word, epiclesis, and which could be translated as calling to come closer. The Church calls, invokes, supplicates, desires the Spirit to walk beside her; she asks the Father as a gift to accompany her. Jesus promised: I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Paraclete (Jn 14:16), which literally means, the one who is invoked to stand by. The gathered community, in fact, has a precise objective: it invokes and asks the Spirit to gather us into one body, to make us one in Christ. For centuries, in fact, every day in the Eucharist we have asked that through communion with the body and blood of Christ, the Spirit may gather us into one body. And in the Gospel text we have just heard, Jesus assures us that whatever we ask for is granted to us. Let us therefore insistently ask for the gift of the Spirit, the gift of the Wisdom of life. The Father gives the Spirit, who makes us one in Christ. This communion - which is the fruit of the presence of the Paraclete in us - is given to us; but it is kept with a meek heart and by showing all meekness towards all, as the second reading indicates.

Blessed Francis of the Cross had fully understood the evangelising power of such apostolic communion, of harmony between persons proclaiming the Gospel. In founding the Apostolic Society of the Divine Saviour with the aim of proclaiming Christ as the Revealer of the one true God who saves, he wanted to unite priests, consecrated men and women and lay people together. He was inspired to create a group, a society of people in which all charisms and ministries would shine and be expressed and exercised. He wished that in sharing the one charism the members of the Apostolic Society would be inspired by the witness, words and deeds of the first apostles, about whom the first reading tells us.

Thus, from its foundation to the present day, the charismatic intuition of Blessed Francis has guided many women and men from different nations and languages to follow the Gospel and, thanks to the work of the Salvatorian Family, has contributed to the spread of the message of salvation in over 50 countries. The communion that characterises the various members of the Apostolic Society shows more and more that evangelisation, carried out in a spirit of collaboration and complementarity, is the work of the Spirit, who by generating communion arouses in the heart the desire to announce to all the experience of the Risen Lord.

Dearest sisters and brothers, may the beatification of Francis of the Cross Jordan be a joyful moment of true ecclesial celebration! May this Eucharistic celebration make us one in Christ and may it awake in us the awareness that today the witness to the holiness of Blessed Jordan passes into the hands of each one of us, it is entrusted to you, to the Salvatorian Family!

To all, then, is entrusted the task of guarding the fire of proclamation and charity, so that it may not be hidden under a bushel, but may burn and shine in the darkness, bringing to all the light of the Risen Lord. So be it!