

MEETING AND TESTIFYING
THE EXPERIENCE OF FR. FRANCESCO CRISTOFARO / 2

One day I get a call. A very kind lady invited me on behalf of the parish priest in her parish church in Martina Franca in the province of Taranto to bring my testimony by presenting the book I had just written. That is how my travels outside the region and the meetings with many people in schools, churches, theaters, town halls, bookstores and prisons began.

Talking about yourself can be easy because it is your life, what you have lived but it can also be so difficult. You never know who comes to the meetings. Of course, there is always the person who comes because he saw me on TV or follows me on Facebook, but there are also many people who carry great suffering in their hearts. The same thing always happens to me, that of being deeply moved when I see the tears fall on the face of the listener.

To date, hundreds of meetings have been held from North to South Italy, including the islands, and many others are scheduled; and from each of them I always brought something nice with me. Priests enrich me in seeing their work and how we share the same concerns and dif-

ficulties. Once in Sorrento, in the packed room there were over fifty disabled people listening to me. At the end of the meeting, one of them gave me a piece of paper: "You said today what I have always wanted to say".

Yes, because in these meetings there are many topics covered. I tell my life: the unhappiness of childhood in not accepting my disability, not being accepted by other peers in the game. I speak of bullying, of integration, of the correct use of words and attitudes. Then I recount the encounter with Jesus, first in the parish and then with the spirituality of the Apostolic Movement. Our Inspirer, Mrs. Maria Marino, was the first person outside my family to look at me in my eyes and not in my physical defect. She has given me so much love. With her words of exhortation and with the catecheses of the priests I understood and knew the true Gospel of Jesus and I began to understand that the Lord also loved me and had a plan for me and that I was called to be the "glory of God". The testimony that I bear still lingers on the call of God, on prayer, on love for parents and on respect for life and at a certain point in the meetings I notice the eyes of the audience widening when I affirm that today I am a happy priest and happy to be a priest and that thanks the Lord for the gift of disability.

This is my story. In these years I have known many stories and met many faces. With each one the Lord has a plan. He calls you as you are and where you are to make you become as he wants.

Father Francesco Cristofaro



To give full realization

The Old Law, which runs from the first verse of Genesis and ends in the last word of the prophet Malachi - according to the canon of the Holy Scriptures - has the Almighty Lord, the Lord of Armies, as a model and example. In his love, in his mercy, truth, justice, compassion, God gives himself as a model to men. This truth is confirmed in the Book of Wisdom: "For with you great strength abides always; who can resist the might of your arm? Indeed, before you the whole universe is as a grain from a balance, or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth. But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook the sins of men that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord and lover of souls" (Wis 11,21-26). The man of God imitates what he sees. God is merciful, compassionate and rich in forgiveness. Even t whoever believes in this God must be rich in forgiveness, mercy and compassion.

Where does the true, complete fulfillment given by Jesus to the Old Testament reside? In changing the model to be inspired by. Jesus Crucified, the Incarnate God, the Only Begotten Son of the Father pierced for our sins is the complete fulfillment. The Crucifix is the New Law of humanity. Not of the Christian, but of humanity. The Christian is the

one who has accepted this New Law and wants to transform it into his life. In fact, what is the whole Sermon on the Mount taught by Jesus to his disciples so that through them it can be taught to every other man? It is the life of the Crucifix made Word. While in the Old Testament the Word had to become life. In the New it is the life of Jesus that must become Word. It must be made Word so that whoever welcomes it makes it his life. In this way the Gospel, the Word becomes ever new, it never gets old, because every believer in Christ Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, gives the Word, the Gospel an ever new, actual, incarnation, one of today.

The Saints are these admirable writers of an ever new Gospel. They write the Crucifix in their life in ways other than yesterday and thus they update the Gospel without any interruption. How many true updates of the gospel do we have? As many as there are saints on our earth. But who are the saints? They are those who run towards a full conformation to Christ Crucified. Since every disciple of Jesus is called to give complete fulfillment to the Law and to the Prophets, it is necessary that Christ Jesus is imprinted every day in the heart, in the body and in the spirit. This might only happen through obedience without gaps and without interruption to every motion of the Holy Spirit, so that no Word uttered by Jesus falls on deaf ears. Mother of the Redemption, Angels and Saints, do not allow us to fail in giving complete fulfillment to Christ in our life.

Msr. Costantino Di Bruno

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**IN THE CHURCH, MARY GIVES HER WOMB
FOR THE REBIRTH OF HUMANITY**
Reflections from the Homily of H.H. Francis on the Solemnity
of Mary Most Holy Mother of God (1.1.2020)

The Solemnity of Mary M.H. Mother of God inaugurates the new calendar year and emphasizes the need to root every Christian journey in her Most Holy womb. Being urged by the words of St. Paul to the Galatians - "When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4: 4) -, in the homily the Pope echoes the expression "born of woman". The role of women in the affair of humanity is of considerable importance, as her constitutive nature is its being for life: where there is a life to be generated, to be built or rebuilt, made to grow, educated or made holy, that place belongs to the woman.

The mission of giving birth to new lives is entrusted to the woman: to Eve, together with Adam, at the beginning of creation, the task of filling the earth (cf. Gen 1:28); to Mary the vocation of being the Mother of Jesus; to the Church that of generating new children of God in Christ the Lord.

Since the beginning of creation, already in the garden of Eden, God found the need to provide man with "a suitable partner for him" (Gen 2,18b) and from his side he creates Eve, the woman: drawing from the nature of Adam, the Lord realizes the one whom he gives man as a wife and with whom he must live in the mystery of the one flesh.

The image of God is impressed in man; it is fully realized only in the mystery of unity, which he is called to live with the woman and which reaches its expressive peak in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of the Most High in the womb of Mary, the new Eve.

The Virgin Mary is the new garden where the Almighty places the new humanity, no longer created in the image and likeness of

the Creator, but that, being born from the most holy womb of the Mother of God, in Christ it becomes the true image of the Lord.

Therefore, it is in the Church that humanity's rebirth is made possible.

The Church is that Mother who, reminding the Word of Jesus, illuminates and shapes the consciences of her children, making them capable of not conforming to the mentality of this world. Through the faithful proclamation of the truth that saves, she is called to consolidate man's journey on the path of the grace. It is through the Church that the Virgin Mary gives her mystical womb to the Holy Spirit and He generates the baptized, the new man, making him the true son of the Father in Christ Jesus: from Our Lady we are born as true children, true image of God and no longer in the image.

Only in full ecclesiality, or in the plurality of charismas organized and lived in respect of the ministerial hierarchy, is it possible for man to realize himself as a new creation, the true image of God. Without the Church man lives the same condition of Adam before the Lord created Eve: he lacks in life and cannot give life. If man makes himself independent from the mystical womb of the Church, the Mother who generated him to faith, he always experiences the sterility of his work.

As Adam is called to see the truth of himself in the woman, so the Christian can find and realize his very being only by overcoming the sin of ignorance of the truth revealed in the Church and of pride, which makes him believe he is perfect when instead he is devoid of his vital part.

Mother of the Redemption, educate us to true ecclesiality and support those who love and defend the truth of Christ Jesus.

Father Rocco Lombardo

**The
Lord's Day
ROMAN RITE**

**YOU WILL NOT ENTER INTO
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
(VI SUNDAY O.T. YEAR A)**

**TO WHICHEVER YOU CHOOSE,
STRETCH FORTH YOUR HAND**
(Sir 15,16-21)

The Lord has put man's present and future in his will. Good and evil, life and death are before him. He extends his hand where he wants, both for good and for evil, both towards water and towards fire and both towards life and towards death. But everyone must know that he will have what he takes. If he reaches out to death, he will have death. Instead, if he goes towards life, he will have life. He who walks in darkness cannot reach eternal light, nor will he who walks from light to light inherit darkness. Today it is precisely in this truth that we no longer believe, indeed we deny it. We walk in darkness and say that in the end we will all be in eternal light. This affirmation and also teaching is in evident contrast with the revealed Word of our God and Lord. But this too belongs to the will of man: falsehood and truth, light and darkness lie before him, he can stretch out his hand where he wishes.

**THE SPIRIT SCRUTINIZES
EVERYTHING** (1Cor 2,6-10)

The truth is of the Holy Spirit, but also intelligence, wisdom, knowledge are of the Spirit of the Lord. All: Word, Christ Jesus, the Father, the Mystery, the same Spirit of God can only be known through the Spirit. But not from the Spirit who is outside of us, but from the Spirit who is in us. The Apostle Paul is full of the Holy Spirit, his word is the bearer of the Spirit of the Lord. He speaks, the Spirit reaches the heart carried by the Word and pierces it, wounds it so that it may get converted and welcome Christ Jesus as its Redeemer and Saviour. Ha-

ving accepted Christ, if we want the Spirit to remain in us, we are asked to live in the Word of Jesus. We live in the Gospel, we live by the Gospel and for the Gospel, the Holy Spirit grows in us and we also grow in truth, intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, light, justice, holiness and love. Christ grows in us if we walk in the Word from faith to faith.

**YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID
TO YOUR ANCESTORS** (Mt 5: 17-37)

The ancients, that is, those who lived before the coming of Jesus, received the Law from the Lord. It was a law in the making, in fieri, that awaited its fulfillment. Having come, Lord Jesus, that Law is no longer sufficient to build the kingdom of God among men. Now we must walk with what Christ Jesus says. His Word brings the ancient Word of God to complete fulfillment. What does Jesus teach? In truth many things. In reality they can be reduced to one: "Observe and contemplate me, keep your gaze fixed on me, crucified for love, nailed to the wood by obedience, meek and humble at heart and you will always know what to do and how to do it". If Jesus is the one who gives his life to atone for the sin of every man, can a disciple of Jesus take revenge, hate, harm those who hurt him? If he acts in this way, he certainly does not imitate his Master. Can the disciple of Jesus love only those who love him, if his Master has given his life for everyone: enemies, wicked, sinners and also for those who crucified him? Pierced Jesus obliges a new morality.

*by the theologian,
Msgr. Costantino Di Bruno*