

Address of H.E. Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi, Apostolic Nuncio
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
Toronto, March 31, 2014

Dear brothers in the Episcopate,

I greet you all with fraternal affection.

I note with interior joy that, while I am beginning my mission as Apostolic Nuncio in Canada, Providence has arranged events such as these in which I am able to first meet the Bishops, the Pastors of the Church in Canada. In fact, earlier this month, I met with the Bishops of Québec; two weeks ago I met with the Permanent Council of your Episcopal Conference; and today I am with you, the Bishops of Ontario. After Easter I will have the opportunity to gather with the Bishops of the Atlantic Region

So, it seems that these circumstances leave us no other choice: Providence has led me to you and you to me: therefore we must be friends, true friends.

In this respect, I always remember with emotion a question posed by Pope Paul VI (soon Blessed), during the course of an Episcopal Ordination. The Holy Father asked: *“Who are the friends of a bishop?”* And he answered: *“...first of all the Bishops themselves...who, in the persons of the Apostles, had been given, par excellence, the new commandment, that of love for one another. ‘As I have loved you, says Jesus, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples: if you love one another’ (John 13:34-35): unity, solidarity, cooperation, generosity, after these explicit and solemn words of the Lord, will make all the Bishops of the Catholic Church a communion of brothers.”* (Paul VI, Homily, June 30, 1974)

I ask the Lord for the grace to live with you, intensely, this invaluable human and divine experience which is Christian friendship; an experience to which Jesus particularly calls us Bishops, by declaring to us in a special way: *“I no longer call you servants... but I call you friends.”* (John 15:15)

In this regard, I would wish to recall two aspects of friendship – according to Jesus – mentioned by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger during the course of the *Missa pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*, April 18, 2005.

The first: *“There are no secrets between friends: Christ tells us all that he hears from the Father; he gives us his full trust and with trust, also knowledge. He reveals his face and his heart to us...”*

“The second element which Jesus uses to define friendship is the communion of wills... ‘Idem velle-idem nolle’... ‘You are my friends if you do as I command you (John 15:14).” The unity of mind and of will is a difficult work if it is dependant only on human effort. In fact, each person has his own mind which moves his own will. But the Christian has an added resource, a unique resource: in fact, as St. Paul reminds us: *“We have the mind (νοῦς) of Christ.”* (1 Cor. 2:16) We have to allow ourselves to be led both personally and as the College of Bishops, by the “mind of Christ” always remembering that it is properly the “communion” that ensures we do not act on the basis of a personal “νοῦς” but according to the mind that is the “νοῦς” of Christ.

As an expression of fraternal friendship, permit me now to share with you a few reflections. These are for me like “interior lights” which accompany and guide me, as each day, a little more, I fix my eyes upon the vast domain that is the Catholic Church in Canada. How do I get closer to your beloved Church? How do I look at it? I am supported by two perspectives, received as valuable gifts from Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

The perspective of Pope Benedict XVI. I refer to the words uttered while he was at the commencement of his pontificate, on October 3, 2005, on the occasion of the beginning of the work of the Synod on the Eucharist: *“...And this is our great consolation. God goes before us. He has already done all things. He has given us peace, forgiveness and love.”* These words are a wondrous echo of what the Angel said to the women who had reached the tomb: *“Go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and he goes before you to Galilee, there you shall see him’.”* (Mt. 28:7).

The Lord is risen! The essential has already been accomplished! After his resurrection he will precede us “to Galilee”, that is to say that he is with us in every one of our beginnings, and even to the very ends of the earth; and he accompanies us with his strength and his light. The resurrection of Christ has already been sown in the vast fields of Canada! Of this Resurrection which goes before us, we are called to be witnesses (Acts 2:32), with our apostolic initiatives, undertaken together with creativity and renewed confidence. We ask the Lord for this grace.

The perspective of Pope Francis. I find it very well expressed, among others, in two of his statements. The first: “*God already lives in our city*”, from which is born an inner attitude prompting us to seek and to find God in every situation and place where he awaits us (cf. J.M. Bergoglio, “Dieu dans la ville”, Ed. Saint-Paul, 2013, p. 32). The second statement is a development of the first: “*I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person’s life. God is in everyone’s life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else, God is in this person’s life. You can, you must seek him in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust in God.*” (Interview with La Civiltà Cattolica, September 19, 2013).

So, secular society, which at first sight may seem indifferent and far from God, is not without God: God lives already in Toronto, Montréal; in the villages and cities of Canada; “*He is in the life of each person.*” So at the pastoral level, our first preoccupation should not be with projects and schedules, but rather “*to be witnesses*” in a way that awakens among people a longing for the infinite, a longing for God and his beauty. Once the desire for God is revived or enkindled again within people, these very people in turn will become witnesses of the life that comes from the Gospel.

Basically, both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis do nothing else than to lead us to the heart of the Christian faith, to the source that makes us capable of facing all difficulties and of overcoming every sadness. In fact, as we know, the essence of the Christian message does not reside principally in the commandment of love of God, but in the invitation to allow ourselves to be touched by his redemptive love, through Jesus, in the gift of the Spirit. It is God, in fact, who has loved us first: the initiative is absolutely his own, totally free, infinitely merciful. We can only love him in return. (cf. 1 John 4:10.19)

If the love of God goes before us, then the starting point, the source of our Episcopal ministry will be primarily contemplation of this love, the “contemplation of the Lord.” Yes, amid the lights and shadows that accompany our pastoral service; in the face of the questions and demands which do not find easy answers; in the face of the religious indifference of many people; in the face of advancing secularization; as also in the face of weakened enthusiasm or the lukewarm sense of belonging we experience in our Christian communities... we know that the only remedy, the only radical response, not sporadic or fragmentary... is the contemplation of the Lord who goes before us to Galilee. It is a contemplation which should be shared as much as possible, as is the case between friends.

I said “contemplation...shared as much as possible” because “*the most important thing is to walk together, work together, to help each other*” (cf. Address of Pope Francis at Assisi, during the meeting with members of the clergy, religious and members of pastoral councils, October 4, 2013). For this reason, as I did at the meeting of the Assembly of the Bishops of Québec, and quite recently, at the Permanent Council, I conclude saying to you also, with Pope Francis: “*Let us walk together behind the Lord, and let us always be called together by him, in the midst of his faithful people, the holy People of God, holy Mother the Church.*” (Homily, February 21, 2014, Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals)

Thank you.