

***Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,  
Votive Mass for the Progress of Peoples  
Maputo, Zimpeto Stadium  
Friday, 6 September 2019***

We have heard a passage of the Sermon on the Plain, taken from the Gospel of Luke. After choosing his disciples and proclaiming the Beatitudes, Jesus adds: “But I say to you that listen, love your enemies” (Lk 6:27). Today, his words are also addressed to us, who hear them in this Stadium.

Jesus speaks with clarity, simplicity and firmness as he traces a path, a narrow path that demands certain virtues. For Jesus is no idealist, someone who ignores reality. He is talking about specific enemies, real enemies, the kind he described in the previous Beatitude (v. 22): those who hate us, exclude us, revile us and defame us.

Many of you can still tell your own stories of violence, hatred and conflict; some concerning things that happened to you personally, others concerning people you knew who are no longer alive, and others still, out of fear that the past wounds will reopen and reverse the progress already made towards peace, as in Cabo Delgado.

Jesus is not calling us to an abstract, ethereal or theoretical love, like that celebrated in fine speeches. The path he proposes is one that he himself already took, the path that led him to love those who betrayed him, who judged him unjustly, who killed him.

It is not easy to speak of reconciliation while wounds are still open from the years of conflict, or to take a step towards forgiveness, which is not the same as ignoring pain or giving up our memories or ideals (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 100). Even so, Jesus Christ is calling us to love and to do good. This means much more than simply ignoring the persons who harmed us, or trying to avoid encountering them. Jesus commands us to show an active, impartial and extraordinary benevolence towards those who have hurt us. Nor does Jesus stop there. He also asks us to bless them and to pray for them. In other words, to speak of them with words of blessing, with words of life not death, to speak their names not in insult or revenge, but to establish a new bond which brings peace. It is a high standard that the Master sets before us!

In inviting us to do this, Jesus wants to end forever that common practice of being Christians yet living under the law of retaliation. We cannot look to the future, or build a nation, an equitable society, on the basis of violence. I cannot follow Jesus if I live my life by the rule of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth”.

No family, no group of neighbours, no ethnic group, much less a nation, has a future if the force that unites them, brings them together and resolves their differences is vengeance and hatred. We cannot come to terms and unite for the sake of revenge, or treating others with the same violence with which they treated us, or plotting opportunities for retaliation under apparently legal auspices. “Weapons of violence, rather than providing solutions, create new

and more serious conflicts” (Evangelii Gaudium, 60). An “equity” born of violence is always a spiral with no escape, and its cost is extremely high. Yet another path is possible, for it is crucial not to forget that our peoples have a right to peace. You have a right to peace.

To make his commandment more concrete and applicable in daily life, Jesus proposes a first golden rule, one within the reach of all. “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). And he helps us realize what is most important in this way of acting towards others: to love each other, to help each other and to lend without expecting anything in return.

“Love one another”, Jesus tells us. Paul translates this as “clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness” (Col 3:12). The world disregards and continues to ignore the virtue of mercy, of compassion. It kills or abandons the handicapped and the elderly, eliminates the wounded and infirm, or shows itself more concerned with the suffering of animals. It has not practiced the goodness and kindness that lead us to consider the needs of our beloved neighbour as our own.

Overcoming times of division and violence calls not only for an act of reconciliation or peace, in the sense of an absence of conflict. It also calls for daily commitment on the part of everyone to an attentive and active concern that makes us treat others with the same mercy and goodness with which we ourselves want to be treated. An attitude of mercy and goodness above all towards those who, by their place in society, quickly encounter rejection and exclusion. An attitude not of the weak but of the strong, an attitude of men and women who realize that it is not necessary to mistreat, denigrate or crush others in order to feel ourselves important, but rather the contrary... And this attitude is the prophetic strength that Jesus Christ himself showed us by his desire to be identified with them (cf. Mt 25:35-45) and by teaching us the path of service.

Mozambique is a land of abundant natural and cultural riches, yet paradoxically, great numbers of its people live below the poverty level. And at times it seems that those who approach with the alleged desire to help have other interests. Sadly, this happens with brothers and sisters of the same land, who let themselves be corrupted. It is very dangerous to think that this is the price to be paid for foreign aid.

“It cannot be like that with you” (Mt 20:26; cf. vv. 26-28). Jesus’ words urge us to take the lead in a different way of acting: that of his kingdom. To be seeds, here and now, of joy and hope, peace and reconciliation. What the Spirit has come to bring about is not a feverish activism but above all a concern for others, acknowledging and appreciating them as our brothers and sisters, even to the point of identifying with their lives and their pain. This is the best barometer for gauging any kind of ideology that would manipulate the poor and situations of injustice for the sake of political or personal interest (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 199). In this way, in all those places where we encounter one another, we can be seeds and instruments of peace and reconciliation.

We want peace to reign in our hearts and in the lives of our people. We want a future of peace. We want “the peace of Christ to reign in our hearts” (Col 3.15), as the letter of Saint Paul said so well. Here Paul uses a word taken from the world of sports, which evokes the umpire or referee who settles disputed issues. “May the peace of Christ act as the umpire in your hearts”. If the peace of Christ acts as the umpire in our hearts, whenever our feelings are in conflict or we feel torn between two contrary feelings, “we should play Christ’s game”, and let his decision keep us on the path of love, the path of mercy, in the option for the most poor and the protection of nature. The path of peace. If Jesus were to serve as the umpire for the conflicting emotions in our hearts, in the complex decisions of our country, then Mozambique will be ensured a future of hope. Then your country will “sing with heartfelt gratitude to God in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Col 3:16).