

# POPE FRANCIS

**“May she be  
a free Church,  
open to the  
challenges of  
the present,  
never on the  
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of fear of losing  
something”**

Meeting with the participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church.  
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edited by **Communion and Liberation**

## *The New Humanism in Christ Jesus*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, The Last Judgment is depicted in the dome of this most beautiful Cathedral. At the centre is Jesus, our light. At the apex of the fresco reads the inscription: “*Ecce Homo*”. Looking at this dome we are drawn upward, as we contemplate the transformation of Christ judged by Pilate, into Christ seated on the judge’s throne. An angel brings him a sword yet Jesus does not take on the symbols of judgment, but instead raises his right hand, showing the marks of the passion, because he “gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6). “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17).

In the light of this merciful Judge, our knees bend in adoration, and our hands and our feet are strengthened. **We can speak of humanism only starting from the centrality of Jesus, discovering in him the traits of the authentic face of man.** It is contemplating the face of Jesus died and risen that recomposes our humanity and also that which has been fragmented through the toils of life or marked by sin. We must not domesticate the power of the face of Christ. His face is the image of his transcendence. It is the *misericordiae vultus*. Let us allow ourselves to be looked at by him. Jesus is our humanism. Let us always be unsettled by his question: “who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15).

In looking to his face, what do we see? First of all **the face of an “emptied” God, of a God who has taken on the condition of servant, humbled and obedient unto death** (cf. Phil 2:7). Jesus’ face is similar to that of so many of our brothers and sisters, humiliated, rendered slaves, emptied. God took on their face. And that face looks at us. God — who is “the being than which no greater can be conceived”, as St Anselm said, or the *Deus semper maior* of St Ignatius of Loyola — becomes ever greater than himself by lowering himself. If we do not lower ourselves we cannot see his face. We will see nothing of his fullness if we do not accept that God emptied himself. And therefore we will understand nothing of Christian humanism and our words will be beautiful, cultured, refined, but they will not be words of faith. They will be words that resound of emptiness.

**I do not want to design here a “new humanism” in the abstract, a certain**

idea of man, **but to present in a simple way some of the traits of Christian humanism which is the humanism of the “mind of Christ Jesus”** (Phil 2:5). They are not abstract provisional sensations of the spirit, but represent the warm interior strength that renders us able to live and make decisions.

What are these sentiments? I would like to present at least three of them to you today.

The first sentiment is *humility*. “Let each of you in humility count others better than yourselves (cf. Phil 2:3), says St Paul to the Philippians. Further on the Apostle speaks of the fact that **Jesus did not consider equality with God a “privilege”** (cf. Phil 2:6). There is a precise message here. Obsession with preserving one’s glory, one’s “dignity”, one’s influence must not play a part in our sentiments. We must seek the glory of God, and this does not coincide with our own. The glory of God which is ablaze in the humility of the grotto of Bethlehem or in the dishonour of the Cross of Christ always astonishes us.

Another sentiment of Jesus which gives shape to Christian humanism is “*disinterest*”. “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4), St Paul asks again. Thus, more than disinterest, we must seek the happiness of those who are beside us. Christian humanity always goes forth. **It is not narcissistic or self-referential**. When our heart is rich and is so self-satisfied, then it has no more room for God. **Please, let us avoid “remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe”** (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 49).

Our duty is to work so as to make this world a better place and to fight. Our faith is revolutionary through an impulse that comes from the Holy Spirit. We must follow this impulse in order to go out of ourselves, to be men and women in accord with the Gospel of Jesus. Any life is decided by the capacity to give oneself. It is there that one transcends oneself, that one becomes fruitful.

Another sentiment of Christ Jesus is that of “*beatitude*”. A Christian is blessed, having the joy of the Gospel within him- or herself. In the Beatitudes

the Lord shows us the way. Travelling along it we human beings can reach the most authentically human and divine happiness. Jesus speaks of a happiness that we experience only when we are poor in spirit. For the great saints beatitude has to do with humiliation and poverty. But even in the humblest part of our people there is a great deal of this beatitude: it is that of one who knows the treasure of solidarity, of sharing even the little that one possesses; the treasure of the daily sacrifice of a job, hard and poorly paid at times, but performed out of love for loved ones; and also that of one's poverty, which however, when lived with trust in the providence and mercy of God the Father, nourishes a great humility.

The Beatitudes that we read in the Gospel begin with a blessing and end with a promise of comfort. They launch us on a path of achievable greatness, that of the spirit, and when the spirit is ready all the rest comes from oneself. Certainly, **if we do not have our heart open to the Holy Spirit, they will seem trifling because they do not lead us to “success”**. To be “blessed”, in order to taste the comfort of friendship with Jesus Christ, it is necessary to have an open heart. Beatitude is an arduous gamble, made by sacrifice, listening and learning, the fruits of which are gathered over time, giving ourselves an incomparable peace: “O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps 34[33]:8).

***Humility, disinterest, beatitude***: these are the three traits that I wished to present today for your meditation on Christian humanism which is born from the humanity of the Son of God. These traits also say something to the Church in Italy, which has reunited today to walk together in an example of synodality. These traits tell us that **we must not be obsessed with “power”, even when it takes on the face of a useful and functional power in the social image of the Church. If the Church does not assume the sentiments of Jesus, she gets disoriented, she loses her way**. If she instead assumes them, she is able to live up to her mission. The sentiments of Jesus tell us that a Church that thinks of herself and of her own interests would be sad. The Beatitudes, after all, are the mirror in which we see ourselves, the one that allows us to know whether we are walking on the right path: it is a mirror that does not lie.

A Church that presents these three traits — humility, disinterest, beatitude

— is a Church that is able to recognize the action of the Lord in the world, in culture, in the everyday life of the people. I have said it more than once and I repeat it again to you today: **“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures”** (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 49).

However, we know that temptations exist; there are so many temptations to confront. I will present you with at least two of them. Do not be afraid, this will not be a list of temptations! Like the list of 15 that I recited to the Curia!

***The first is that of the Pelagian.*** It spurs the Church not to be humble, disinterested and blessed. It does so through the appearance of something good. Pelagianism **leads us to trust in structures, in organizations, in planning that is perfect because it is abstract.** Often it also leads us to assume a controlling, harsh and normative manner. Norms give Pelagianism the security of feeling superior, of having a precise bearing. This is where it finds its strength, not in the lightness of the Spirit’s breath. Before the evils or problems of the Church **it is useless to seek solutions in conservatism and fundamentalism, in the restoration of obsolete practices and forms that even culturally lack the capacity to be meaningful. Christian doctrine is not a closed system, incapable of raising questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living, is able to unsettle, is able to enliven.** It has a face that is supple, a body that moves and develops, flesh that is tender: **Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ.**

The reform of the Church then — and **the Church is *semper reformanda*** — is foreign to Pelagianism. She is not exhausted in the countless plans to change her structures. It instead means **being implanted and rooted in Christ, allowing herself to be led by the Spirit. Thus everything will be possible with genius and creativity.**

The Church of Italy lets herself be carried by his powerful — and thus, at times, restless — breath. She always takes on the spirit of her great explorers,

who on ships were passionate about navigating the open sea and not frightened by frontiers and storms. **May she be a free Church, open to the challenges of the present, never on the defensive out of fear of losing something.** Never on the defensive out of fear of losing something. And, encountering the people along the way, she takes on St Paul's aim: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some**" (1 Cor 9:22).

*A second temptation to defeat is that of gnosticism.* This leads to **trusting in logical and clear reasoning, which nonetheless loses the tenderness of a brother's flesh.** The attraction of gnosticism is that of "a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but **which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings**" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 94). Gnosticism cannot transcend.

The difference between Christian transcendence and any form of gnostic spiritualism lies in the **mystery of the incarnation.** Not putting into practice, not leading the Word into reality, means building on sand, staying within pure idea and decaying into intimisms that bear no fruit, that render its dynamism barren.

The Italian Church has great saints whose examples can help her to live the faith with humility, disinterest and gladness, from Francis of Assisi to Philip Neri. But let us also think of the simplicity of fictional characters such as Don Camillo who was paired with Peppone. It strikes me how in Guareschi's stories the prayer of a good priest merges with the evident closeness to the people. Don Camillo said of himself: "I am a poor, country priest who knows each of his parishioners individually, who loves them, who knows their sorrows and their joys, who suffers and laughs with them". Closeness to the people and prayer are the key to living a popular, humble, generous and happy Christian humanism. If we lose this contact with the faithful People of God, we lose humanity and we go no where.

**So what do we have to do, father? — you would say.** What is the Pope asking of us?

**It is up to you to decide:** people and pastors together. **Today I simply invite you to lift your head and contemplate once again the “Ecce Homo”** that we have over our heads. Let us stop to contemplate the scene. Let us turn to Jesus who is portrayed here as the Universal Judge. What will happen “when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne”? (Mt 25:31). What does Jesus tell us?

We can imagine this Jesus who is above our heads saying a few words to each of us and to the Church of Italy. He might say: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Mt 25:34-36). I am reminded of the priest who welcomed this very young priest who gave testimony.

But he could also say: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me” (Mt 25:41-43).

The Beatitudes and the words that we have just read on the universal judgment help us to live Christian life at a level of holiness. The words are few, simple, but practical. Two pillars: the Beatitudes and the words of the Last Judgment. May the Lord give us the grace to understand his message! **And let us look once again to the features of Jesus’ face and to his gestures.** We see Jesus who eats and drinks with sinners (Mt 2:16; Mt 11:19); we contemplate him as he converses with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-26); we perceive him as he meets Nicodemus at night (Jn 3:1-21); with fondness we savour the scene where he allows a prostitute to anoint his feet (cf. Lk 7:36-50); we feel his saliva on the tip of our tongue, which is then released (Mk 7:33). We admire the “affinity of all the people” who surround his disciples — us, that is — and we experience their “glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46-47).

I ask bishops to be pastors. Nothing more: pastors. May this be your joy: “I am

a pastor”. It will be the people, your flock, to sustain you. I read recently of a bishop who told that he was on the subway at rush hour and there were so many people that he did not know where to put his hand to brace himself. Being pushed right and left, he leaned against people in order not to fall. And thus he thought that, other than prayer, what keeps a bishop on his feet is his people.

May nothing and no one take away the joy of being sustained by your people. As pastors **do not be preachers of complex doctrines, but proclaimers of Christ**, who died and rose for us. **Concentrating on the essential**, on the *kerygma*. **There is nothing more solid, deep and secure than this message**. But let it be all the People of God to proclaim the Gospel, people and pastors, I mean. I expressed this pastoral concern of mine in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. nn. 111-134).

To all the Italian Church I recommend what I indicated in that Exhortation: social inclusion of the poor, who have a privileged place in the People of God, and the capacity to meet and dialogue in order to foster social friendship in your country, seeking the common good.

*The option for the poor* is “a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42). This option “is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty” (Benedict XVI, *Address at the Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 13 May 2007, n. 3). The poor know well the sentiments of Christ Jesus because they know through experience the suffering Christ. “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198).

**May God protect the Church of Italy from every surrogate of power, image and money.** Evangelical poverty is creative, welcoming, supportive and rich in hope.

We are here in Florence, the city of beauty. How much beauty in this city has



been placed at the service of charity! I am thinking, for example, of the *Hospital of the Innocents*. One of the first examples of Renaissance architecture was created to serve abandoned children and destitute mothers. These mothers often left with their newborns medals split in two, with which they hoped to be able to recognize their children in better times by presenting the other half. Here then, we must imagine that our poor people have a broken medal. We have the other half. Because the Mother Church in Italy has half of everyone's medal and recognizes all of her abandoned, oppressed, weary children. This has always been one of your virtues, because you know well that the Lord poured out his blood not for some, nor for few nor for many, but for all.

***I also advise that you have, in a special way, the capacity to dialogue and encounter. Dialogue is not negotiating. Negotiation is trying to obtain one's "slice" of the common pie. This is not what I mean. It is seeking the common good for all.*** Discussing together, I would dare say getting angry together, thinking about better solutions for all. Many times the encounter involves conflict. Dialogue is always given to conflict: thus it is logical and predictable. We must neither fear it nor ignore it, but accept it. “It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 227).

We must always remember, however, that authentic humanism does not exist unless it contemplates love as a bond between human beings, be it of an interpersonal, intimate, social, political or intellectual nature. Rooted herein is the need for dialogue and encounter in order to build together with others in civil society. We know that the best response to conflicts of human beings, from the well-known *homo homini lupus* of Thomas Hobbes is the “*Ecce homo*” of Jesus who does not recriminate, but welcomes and, paying in person, saves.

Italian society builds itself up when its diverse cultural treasures can dialogue in a constructive way: popular, academic, artistic, technological, economic, political, the way of youth, that of the media.... May the Church be fermented by dialogue, encounter, unity. After all, our own formulations of faith are the fruit of dialogue and encounter among cultures, communities and various situations. We must not fear dialogue: on the contrary it is pre-

cisely confrontation and criticism that help us to preserve theology from **being transformed into ideology.**

Remember moreover that the best way to dialogue is not that of speaking and debating but that of doing something together, of making plans: not alone, among Catholics, but together with all those who are of good will.

Do not be afraid to engage **in the exodus necessary for every authentic dialogue. Otherwise it is not possible to comprehend the reasons of the other,** nor to completely understand that **a brother is worth more than the positions that we judge as far from our own authentic certitudes. He is a brother.**

May the Church also be able **to give a clear response to the threats that emerge** from public debate: this is **one of the forms of specific contribution of believers to the building of a common society. Believers are citizens.** I say it here in Florence, where art, faith and citizenship are always arranged in a dynamic balance between complaint and proposal. The nation is not a museum but a collective work under permanent construction in which the very things that differentiate, including political or religious memberships, are to be placed in common.

I appeal above all “to you, young men, because you are strong”, said the Apostle John (1 Jn 1:14). **Young people, may you overcome apathy. May no one scorn your youth,** but may you learn to be models in speech and deed (cf. 1 Tim 4:12). I ask you to be builders of Italy, to put yourselves to work for a better Italy. **Please, do not watch life from the balcony,** but commit yourselves, immerse yourselves in the vast social and political dialogue. May the hands of your faith be raised to heaven, and may they do so while they edify a city built on relationships in which the love of God is the foundation. **In this way you will be free to accept today’s challenges,** to experience the changes and transformations.

One could say that today we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change. The situations that we are living in today therefore pose new challenges which, at times, are also difficult for us to understand. **Our time requires us to live problems as challenges and not as obstacles: the**

**Lord is active and at work in our world.** Thus, go out into the streets and go out to the crossroads: call all those whom you find, excluding no one (cf. Mt 22:9). Accompany especially those who are on the roadside, “the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb” (Mt 15:30). **Wherever you may be, build neither walls nor borders but village squares and field hospitals.**

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**I prefer a restless Italian Church,** ever closer to the abandoned, the forgotten, the imperfect. **I would like a glad Church** with a mother’s face, that understands, accompanies, caresses. You too dream of this Church, believe in her, **innovate with freedom.** The Christian humanism that you are called to live radically affirms the dignity of every person as a Child of God, it establishes among all human beings a fundamental fraternity, teaches one to understand work, to inhabit creation as a common home, to furnish reasons for optimism and humour, even in the middle of a life many times more difficult.

Although it is not for me to say how to accomplish this dream today, allow me to leave you just one indication for the coming years: in every community, in every parish and institution, in every diocese and circumscription, in every region, try to launch, in a synodal fashion, **a deep reflection on the *Evangelii Gaudium*,** to draw from it practical parameters and to launch its dispositions, especially on the three or four priorities that you will identify in this meeting. I am certain of your capacity to put yourselves into a creative movement in order to make this study practical. I am sure of it because you are an adult Church, age-old in the faith, firmly rooted and with an abundance of fruit. Therefore be creative in expressing the genius that your great ones, from Dante to Michelangelo, expressed in an incomparable way. **Believe in the genius of Italian Christianity,** which is neither a legacy of individuals nor of elites, but of the community, of the people of this extraordinary country.

I entrust you to Mary, who here in Florence is venerated as “the Most Holy Annunciation”. In the fresco located in the so-named Basilica — where I will be going shortly — the angel is silent and Mary speaks, saying “*Ecce ancilla Domini*”. All of us are in those words. May the entire Church of Italy pronounce them with Mary. Thank you.

We can speak of humanism only starting from the centrality of Jesus, discovering in him the traits of the authentic face of man. It is contemplating the face of Jesus died and risen that recomposes our humanity and also that which has been fragmented through the toils of life.

Pope Francis