
Pope Francis: “we are called to fight every form of slavery”

The intuition of St Daniel Comboni against colonialism. Pope Francis reiterated his instruction: “Save Africa with Africa.” He did so this morning when he resumed the cycle of catechesis titled “The Passion for Evangelisation: the apostolic zeal of the believer”, during the General Audience in St Peter's Square. He focused his meditation on the theme “*Saint Daniel Comboni, apostle for Africa and a prophet of mission*”. “To take the path of evangelisation from the people’s culture. To evangelize the culture and to inculturate the Gospel go together,” said the Pope, recalling the Saint's efforts to revive missionary commitment: “The people evangelised were not only 'objects' but 'subjects' of mission.”

The condemnation of slavery. The approach to Africa, without an element present in its history and also in its present, namely slavery, because it “commodifies” the human person, “whose value is reduced to being useful to someone or something.” “But Jesus, God made man, elevated the dignity of every human being and exposed the falsity of every slavery.” And Comboni “became aware of the evil of slavery.” Moreover, “he understood that social slavery is rooted in an even deeper slavery, that of the heart, that of sin, from which the Lord frees us. As Christians, therefore, we are called to fight every form of slavery.” In the Pope’s words the awareness that “Unfortunately, slavery, like colonialism, is not something from the past.” “In the Africa that Comboni loved so much, which is today torn by so many conflicts, political exploitation gave way to an ‘economic colonialism’ that was equally enslaving. (...) This is a tragedy to which the economically more advanced world often closes its eyes, ears and mouth.” Thus Francis renewed his appeal, delivered during the meeting with authorities in Kinshasa, on January 31 2023. “Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered.”

Evangelisation in Africa. In his evangelising mission, Saint Daniel wanted to make all Christians protagonists. He recognized the need for an integral evangelization involving local clergy, catechists and lay leaders”, he said. Francis added in unscripted remarks: “Catechists are a treasure in the Church. Catechists are those who bring evangelization forward. With reference to Comboni's commitment for Africa, the Pope underlined that “He also conceived of human development in this way, cultivating the arts and professions, fostering the role of the family and of women in the transformation of culture and society.” “And how important it is, even today, to make the faith and human development progress within the context of mission, rather than transplant external models or limit them to sterile welfarism!” Recalling Saint Daniel’s commitment, the Pope reminded the faithful that “his great missionary passion was not primarily the fruit of human endeavor. He was not driven by his own courage or motivated solely by important values such as freedom, justice and peace. His zeal came from the joy of the Gospel, drawn from Christ’s love which then led to love of Christ!”. He thus condemned clericalism, “lived by crooked-necked people filled with egoism and with themselves,” the Pope added, quoting from Comboni. Finally, the fountainhead of missionary ability, which, for the Saint, is charity – the Pope said – especially, “the zeal by which he made the sufferings of others his own.” “His passion for evangelization never led him to act as a soloist, but always in communion, in the Church.” With a message: “Do not forget those who are crucified in history and do not forget the poor.”

Appeals for peace. The Pope exhorted the faithful to extend a thought “to President Giorgio Napolitano, who is seriously ill.” “May he have consolation, this servant of the State” he said. In his greetings to the Italian-speaking pilgrims, the Pontiff extended an appeal for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine. “Yesterday, I heard the disturbing news from Nagorno Karabakh, in the Southern Caucasus, where the already critical humanitarian situation is now aggravated by additional armed clashes. I extend my heartfelt appeal to all involved and to the international community that the weapons be silenced and that every effort be made to find peaceful solutions for the good of the people and respect for human dignity.” “Let us remain united in closeness and prayer for the dear, martyred Ukraine.”

