INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

St Theresa Cathedral, Juba, South Sudan

4 Feb, 2024

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Greetings and blessings from Pope Francis. My visit marks the first anniversary of the Ecumenical Pilgrimage for peace to South Sudan 3-5 February 2023. made by the Holy Father, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Ian Greenshields. Wishing to acknowledge and increase the fruitfulness of that visit, I am so happy to be here to pray with you. I thank my brother Bishops, priests, religious men and women and all of you, lay faithful and citizens, for the warm welcome. I feel at home here among you, as the Holy Father did.

In his name, I bring you the Holy Father's affection, solidarity and prayer. He has this world's youngest nation close to his heart, as he manifested in word and gesture during the 2019 retreat in Rome for your nation's political leaders; in his visit to this great nation a year ago; and in his repeated exhortations to seek peace and make it lasting. My visit in his name is another sign of the solidarity of the whole Church with you in your struggle for peace.

Dear people of God, with little changed or improved since last year, I repeat the Holy Father's message to civil authorities and diplomats in Juba. Stressing the need for unity, reconciliation, cooperation, peace, he evoked the Nile to inspire a change in political will. "Just as the Nile leaves its sources to begin its course, so the course of history will leave behind the enemies of peace and bring renown to those who are true peacemakers. Indeed, as Scripture tells us, 'there is posterity for the man [and woman] of peace' (cf. *Ps* 37:37)."

Then, recalling the words of Christ to the disciple who drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, Pope Francis pleaded: "I beg you, with all my heart, to accept four simple words...: No more of this! (*Lk* 22:51)." The Holy Father insisted: "*No more of this*" without "if's" or "but's". No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about who is responsible for it, no more leaving your people athirst for peace. No more destruction: it is time to build! Leave the time of war behind and let a time of peace dawn!" Then he encouraged everyone "to move on from words to deeds. It is time to turn the new page: it is the time for commitment to an urgent and much-needed transformation."

The Holy Father called upon the leaders of this nation:

- to ensure the delivery of basic social services;
- to provide good governance and proper management of public resources;
- to end the widespread community violence;
- to promote peaceful co-existence through healing, forgiveness and reconciliation;
- to promote human development;
- to open political and civic spaces and participation for all, especially youth and women;
- to respect the dignity and human rights of vulnerable populations especially the returnees and refugees, internally displaced persons, children, persons with disability, the elderly;
- and to care for our common home, the planet Earth.

The Holy Father also prayed that the Pilgrimage "may ... be for everyone an occasion *to revive hope*, not only for the government, but for everyone. Let each citizen understand that the time has come to stop being carried along by the tainted waters of hatred, tribalism, regionalism and ethnic differences." In fact, these changes will water the soil of this nation like "fresh and life-giving springs."

There are many efforts towards implementing peace and reconciliation in this country: The government, other political actors, the Church, civil society, local and international partners and the country's people across the land and in camps for the many displaced are all – each in their own way – desiring, praying and striving for peace.

With these important efforts in mind, let us now turn to the Word of God for this 5th Sunday of the year. Today's Gospel offers three important points which show how Jesus lived his life and related with others.

First, the miraculous healing of Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with fever. Jesus's deep sensitivity to people in need extended beyond the house to all in the city. The needs of others took precedence over his need to rest.

The healing ministry of Jesus has special meaning for this country, which for decades has experienced vicious cycles of conflict and violence and the hardship and suffering they cause. Like Job in the first reading, many of you can say, "I have been assigned months

of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. I am filled with restlessness until the dawn."

But Jesus works until nightfall to bring healing to the people. Your problems and your people's sufferings are like the fever which kept Peter's mother-in-law in bed. Now Jesus, desiring your well-being and your service, is constantly reaching out to take you and your people by the hand and lift you up again.

I said "service" because the Gospel says that, after she was healed, *she waited on them*. Grateful that Jesus heals us, we, too, are called to reach out to those in need, help lift them up out of their suffering, and free them to serve others in need. This is what we need to do in order to live peacefully with each other: to reach out, to heal and forgive, to find our unity in caring for one another, to find our peace in walking together.

The second point of the Gospel is the large number of people who come to Jesusto have their needs met. It was their need, not their knowledge about Jesus or their personal affection for him, that brought them to him. They sought him out for what he would do for them, and they put their trust in him, and afterwards they were grateful. These are the first steps in knowing and loving Jesus and, through him, the Father. The gifts of healing we receive from the Lord, as individuals and as the South Sudanese people, are meant to motivate gratitude to God and service of our suffering siblings. So, our prayer should always include gratitude for his mercy, praise for his greatness, and lead to care for our brothers and sisters in need and for our common home.

The third and final moment of the Gospel is Jesus rising early to pray. Communion with his heavenly Father was absolutely necessary for Jesus to maintain a ministry of preaching the Kingdom and healing the sick that would lead to his passion, death and resurrection. Today, our ministries of healing, liberation, promoting reconciliation and building peace also require our constant prayer, otherwise we get lost, confused and discouraged.

When the apostles realized that Jesus was missing, they went to looking for him. And when they found him, they said: *Everyone is looking for you*. After the Holy Father's prophetic visit a year ago, is everyone in South Sudan looking for Jesus in each new situation, in front of each new challenge?

Let's never give up looking for Jesus. Let's keep asking him to teach us how to pray, to renew our faith and hope and charity, to motivate and orient our service of others and our search for peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a critical moment in the political life of your country. As you prepare for the general elections, pray and work hard to ensure that it is nonviolent, fair, transparent, credible and peaceful. To achieve this, there is groundwork to be done,

putting into place needed infrastructures in the political sphere, preparing your minds and hearts for possible transition. A peaceful transfer of power not only indicates political maturity, but it also assures good governance and holistic development, both of which are so needed. I therefore urge you to be faithful to the peace agreement, not just you but also members of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), and all signers of the peace agreement. It is critical that your integrity and commitment bring about the yet-unrealized remaining steps for the election process. The full implementation of these prerequisites will be a guarantee to the population of South Sudan that never again will there be bloodshed, never again will South Sudanese fear insecurity in their own Country and never again will the South Sudanese need to seek refuge in other countries due to violence. This is your responsibility as leaders. Don't forget that God is watching over you as a Shepherd and a Judge, and don't forget to root even this work in prayer.

As a final note: for sustainable peace to be realized, it is important to include everybody in the process. I encourage you to continue to cooperate with the efforts of Sant' Egidio and other actors in inviting the groups that are resistant to participate in the process. A family will not achieve inclusion and peace until every member is in the presence of the other, under the same roof, as it were, and engaging with each other.

I once again assure you, the people of South Sudan, of the perpetual prayers of the Holy Father and of my prayers that you grow as a nation, as a family, in peace.

AMEN.