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26TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

**HOLY MASS**

*Vatican, 5-7 December 2013*

*Greeting and introduction*

After a longer than usual interval – the reasons for which we are all aware – we meet again for the 26<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. To all of you – members and consultors – I extend a cordial welcome. Thank you for accepting our invitation to be here today and for your willingness to play your part in contributing to the mission of our Dicastery.

The responsorial psalm in today's liturgy asks us to: "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good..." (*Ps* 118:1). In this inaugural Mass of our Plenary Assembly, we want to truly thank the Lord "for he is good" and has blessed us all at this time in a special way. I am thinking of the many events of great importance in which our Council has been involved. At the same time, I would like to particularly invoke the Holy Spirit to bless our Assembly during which we shall deal with a very current topic: *Proclaiming Christ in the digital era*.

Now let us prepare our hearts to meet the Lord in this Eucharist through an act of sincere repentance for our sins, and let us say together: *I confess to Almighty God...*

## *Homily*

### **To build a house on rock...**

1. In the Gospel reading that we have just heard, Jesus tells us that we are all builders of a house, and this house is really our lives. Some build it well and wisely with a sense of responsibility, and they have nothing to fear in the future. Others build it badly and foolishly and with a lack of responsibility. This could lead them towards ruin. The decisive criterion in building your house, that is, your life, is in the choice of foundations. If you are building on solid rock it will allow you to stand up to every adversity in life and every challenge that life offers. If you are building on sand you will have no stability and will head towards ruin, at the mercy of crises at any moment. This is the challenge that Jesus throws at his disciples in order to say that there is only one rock on which we can build our lives: God and his Word, accepted by us and put into practice. Sand represents our human uncertainties and our worldly outlook. That is why Jesus admonishes us by saying: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (*Mt 7:21*). Doing God’s will is therefore the safe rock on which we should build. This is the only base that is able to hold the weight of a human life. As we can see, Christian faith is certainly not abstract. It means following the Master, a profound encounter with the person of the risen Christ, obedient compliance with his word...

2. Each of us, in building our life, is called to choose rock or sand. This choice is not easy or immediate in our post-modern culture. We often need the courage to go against the current with respect to the dominant culture. It is a “liquid” culture that has no points of reference or clear principles of behaviour. People nowadays are fascinated by the provisional and the ephemeral. The post-modern world tries to convince us that it is quicker to build on sand, and also more enjoyable and convenient than building on rock. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This liquid mentality has unfortunately penetrated the lives of many of the baptised. The “worldliness” of which Pope Francis has spoken has entered our way of reasoning and is in the choices we make each day. It fascinates us and makes us lose sight of the beauty and security of the rock which is the Gospel. What should we do in this situation? How can we avoid losing the compass of the gospel in our lives? How can we defend ourselves from a “liquid society”? In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah encourages us to “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” (*Is 26:4*). To build our life on rock, the rock that is God, is a wise thing to do and it is the source of true happiness. Unfortunately, even we Christians are not convinced of this. The tragedy for our contemporaries is precisely the rejection of God’s Word and teachings and the acceptance of the diktats of the world which are ephemeral and illusory.

3. The word of God in today's liturgy introduces us to the topic that we shall deal with in our Plenary. We shall be looking at a new phenomenon that cannot be regarded merely as a means of communication (the internet), but that has become a real digital culture that is able to enter deeply into the lives of people. Some say that it can even give birth to a "digital person". (We speak of "digital natives"). In many ways it is a fascinating novelty that opens up new horizons to humanity. It opens up new frontiers for the Church in its evangelising mission, and this should be taken up with courage and foresight. Many people see it to be a very promising instrument for evangelisation. At the same time, however, there are those who express their reserve about it in these times in which there is a widespread anthropological crisis. In the digital world, liquid post-modernity is particularly evident. It is really a very complex phenomenon that shows many lights and also many shades. We Christians must approach this with serious study and attentive discernment, and we must be free of prejudice and fear. This is precisely what we intend to do here, with God's help. We do not intend to denounce the risks that come with this new culture, but we want to learn together how to live as Christians in this new continent, without losing our identity.

4. Pope Francis encouraged us in this direction when he said: "It is therefore important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages. Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment" (*Address at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*, 21 September 2013, no. 2). Pope Francis tells us that the digital world is a real missionary challenge for Christians: "We must ask ourselves: are we up to the task of bringing Christ into this area, or better still, of bringing others to meet Christ? Can we walk alongside the pilgrim of today's world as Jesus walked with those companions to Emmaus, warming their hearts on the way and bringing them to an encounter with the Lord? Are we able to communicate the face of a Church which is 'home' to all? (*Ibid.* no. 3). We need adequate preparation in order to face this challenge, and lay Christians in particular because, as the Pope says, "the great digital continent not only involves technology but is made up of real men and women who bring with them their hopes, their suffering, their concerns and their pursuit of what is true, beautiful and good" (*Ibid.* no. 3). In any case, one thing is certain, the Pope reminds us, and that is that the digital media must not let us forget that an encounter with Christ is a personal encounter and proclamation is still done "person to person" (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, n.127-129). Technological media are important but they are not enough. In the evangelising process, people are essential. It would be a great mistake to leave the proclamation of the Gospel to technological media, even though they are powerful. Christ entrusts his missionary mandate to each of us personally: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk* 16:15). We are all called personally and we must respond personally.

Let us ask the Lord to give us light and the gift of wisdom and discernment so that we can reflect on the new technologies and appreciate the wonderful service they can give in proclaiming the Gospel.