

Homily of bishop Domenico Sorrentino

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Domenico Sorrentino, bishop of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino

Assisi, 22 October 2011

Blessing of the Monastery of San Masseo

Today here begins again a thread, one of the many threads of this marvelous history. Who weaves this thread?

God's Spirit, he is the great weaver

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Listen to the homily (in Italian):

Ne 8,1-4a.5-6.8-12; 2Tm 3,14-4,5; Jn 4,19-24

"It is I who speak to you" (Jn 4,26). This revelation by the Lord is made today in our midst. We too, like the Samaritan woman, are seeking him, and our steps are always somewhat uncertain and our seeking is always a little groping. But he is near and tells us: "It is I who speak to you". This place today becomes gilled with his presence, and we are listening to the Word so that this presence may be luminous for us, so that it may fill our hearts, so that it may give us a sign for our footsteps.

Let us then return to listening to the Word from the beginning, in the book of Nehemiah. The people gathered after a great crisis, actually still in a situation of crisis, has finally been able — by pure grace, notwithstanding the toil, the frailties that resisted it — to have its temple and its walls, or rather that which gives meaning to the temple and to the walls: it is to receive the Lord's presence in his Word, in his Wisdom, in his Law. We have heard what happened: the Word was proclaimed, the Law was announced, explained. It touches the hearts, and life changes, is touched, is renewed. This is what should happen every time that we listen to the Word. This is what only the Lord's Word is capable of, and for that reason we are men and women who listen, who have believed in this Word, and who let themselves be illumined by this Word. It is well, dear brothers and sisters of Bose who are taking up your journey here with us, that this should be happening in this local Church, which this year is proceeding around this same theme of God's Word. Always a Church lives by the Word. This year we have taken up listening in a special way to the Old Testament, we want to become familiar with those pages: a long history of salvation, in which God made himself near to his people and through his people to all humanity so as to prepare the great announcement, the apex of revelation, the culmination, what we have heard in the Gospel. here we are then asking this Word to orient the journey of this community. There we have a crisis that is resolved by walls that rise, that are restored, somewhat as here in San Masseo we see these walls in new splendor, a long history that is reborn, just as in consequence within and outside these walls the Lord's living temple should be reborn, inspired by the Gospel, as here in Assisi it has been announced and lived for two thousand years, especially as St Francis lived it. We wish that this house may become for our community — and for many others that, attracted by Assisi's appeal, come as pilgrims — a place where the Word may touch hearts, the Word proclaimed by you, the Word witnessed by you.

We have heard in Paul's words to Timothy how this should happen: with what care, with what concern, with what trepidation, because the Word is beset by snares. Of course, in itself it is greater than any worldly snare, but in the play of freedom, because it is a Word that reveals itself to us as a word of alliance. The Lord awaits also our correspondence, many times, always showing such patience in his divine pedagogy in accepting also our slowness. If everything, thus, depends on God's grace, a great deal depends also on us, on our correspondence. For this reason the Apostle said to the son on whom he had imposed his hands and whom he designated as the head of the community: "Don't lose heart, above all be faithful to the Word that you have received, that you have welcomed" (cf. 2Tm 3,14), the Word that had

passed through the witness of his family, of his community, the Word on which he builds his own existence and to which he is to show himself continually faithful, and at the same time the Word that is to be announced: "Don't lose heart, insist in season and out of season, because the time will come when people's ears will be itching for anything new and will turn to myths" (cf. 2Tm 4,2-4). Paul's times, our times, times always the same, because it is the temptation of the human heart ever since sin blinded its eyes. The light of Him who rose from the dead comes continually to shatter this yoke of slavery, to break through the darkness, and to let into the darkness the light that saves. San Masseo should be a new light for Assisi. All the places in Assisi are this: they are this on account of the history with which they are impregnated, but they should become so all the more on account of the living testimony that vibrates in them. This is what I wish for you, dear brothers and sisters, this is what we are praying for.

Today here begins again a thread, one of the many threads of this marvelous history. Who weaves this thread? God's Spirit, he is the great weaver, and we allow ourselves to be woven. We want to be brothers and sisters of one community, to feel ourselves family, everyone with his identity, everyone with his history. It is well that in your history you carry also a particular ecumenical accent. When this church was founded, the Church was not yet divided. Today unfortunately it is, and all of us long for full unity, all of us want to construct it, in the humility of listening to the one Word, recognizing the Lord in our midst, and recognizing him particularly in the Eucharist. In a little while this Word that was heard will become a living Presence, a living bread that nourishes us, and we with this Word will have the strength of Elias, the strength to journey even in the desert and amidst trials. Courage, dear brothers and sisters! Thank you for this choice that you have made and that certainly the Lord inspired you: the Lord's word to which you have corresponded. Thank you for having given it a welcome, thank you for what you are, thank you for what you will be in this community. We will very soon see together what we can do for each other, we have already begun to ask some things of you, already in the following days you will speak some words to us and in any case you will hear many words, because brothers listen to one another, and all of us listen to the one Master. As pastor of this Church I am truly glad today to be able to say to you "welcome". I know that in my words it is the Lord who tells you this, but also many brothers and sisters who have awaited you. It was a long wait, it had its moments of weariness. But, as you see, when the Lord wants something to be done, he then in the end has it come about. Thank you for being: we will journey together. We find ourselves together at the right moment, when your spirituality, your journey can really be in step with the Church. Thus it will not be hard for us to understand each other. These places by now speak to us, we feel them already as ours, we feel them already alive. They speak with their light, their tradition, their openness towards the future.

Not long ago I was coming from a meeting of Caritas, which centered on the crisis that is worrying our times, especially the poor. For them too I read a passage of Nehemiah, not the one that was proclaimed here, but the passage where, facing the challenges of the social crisis, the governor, this time, calls for fidelity and says: "It is a time of global renewal that may touch our hearts and give to our relations a timber of greater fraternity, under the sign of a reciprocal forgiveness of our debts" (cf. Ne 5,1-13), under the sign of a truly common journey, in which we can say with Paul: "May our only debt be mutual love" (cf. Rm 13,8). May this be what is experienced here in this place, in this "Bose of Assisi". May it be above all the love drawn from the Word and nourished by the Eucharist.

Thank you, dearly beloved, thank you, the sisters too, who will not be here, but who today give us the gift of their presence and who certainly will be here spiritually. Thank you also, the people of God who have wanted to welcome in such a festive manner this new community.

In a little while we will bless the altar. The altar is Jesus, the solid rock that we cling to, the solid rock on which we build. May the Lord Jesus be always the foundation of this house and of this Church. Amen.

mgr. Domenico Sorrentino

bishop of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino