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First Homily of Pope Leo XIV: “We are called to bear witness to our joyful faith in Christ”

Homily during Holy Mass with the Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel on the morning of 9 May 2025.

05/09/2025

I will begin with a word in English, and the rest is in Italian.

But I want to repeat the words from the Responsorial Psalm: “I will sing a new song to the Lord, because he has done marvels.”

And indeed, not just with me but with all of us. My brother Cardinals, as we celebrate this morning, I invite you to recognize the marvels that the Lord has done, the blessings that the Lord continues to pour out on all of us through the Ministry of Peter.

You have called me to carry that cross, and to be blessed with that mission, and I know I can rely on each and every one of you to walk with me, as we continue as a Church, as a community of friends of Jesus, as believers to announce the Good News, to announce the Gospel.

[In Italian:] Now in Italian.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*Mt 16:16*). With these words, Peter – questioned by the

Master, together with the other disciples, about his faith in Him – summarizes the patrimony that the Church has guarded, deepened, and transmitted for two thousand years through apostolic succession.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; the only Savior and the one who reveals the face of the Father.

In Him, in order to draw close and make Himself accessible to men, God revealed Himself to us in the trusting eyes of a child, the lively mind of a young man, and the mature features of an adult (cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22), and finally appeared to his own after the Resurrection in his glorious body. Thus He showed us a model of holy humanity that we can all imitate, along with the promise of an eternal destiny that transcends all our limitations and capacities.

In his response, Peter grasps both of these things: the gift of God and the path to be followed in order to be transformed by it. These are inseparable dimensions of salvation, entrusted to the Church to proclaim for the good of all humanity.

Entrusted to us, chosen by Him before we were formed in the womb (cf. *Jer* 1:5), reborn in the waters of Baptism, and, beyond our limitations and without any merit of our own, brought here and sent forth from here, so that the Gospel may be preached to every creature (cf. *Mk* 16:15).

In particular, now that God, through your vote, has called me to succeed the first of the Apostles, He entrusts this treasure to me so that, with his help, I may be a faithful steward of it (cf. *1 Cor* 4:2) for the good of the entire Mystical Body of the Church; so that she may become ever more a city set on a hill (cf. *Rev* 21:10), an ark

of salvation sailing through the waves of history, a beacon that illuminates the world's nights. And this not so much because of the magnificence of her structures or the grandeur of her buildings – as in the monuments in which we now find ourselves – but through the holiness of her members, “the people He has made his own, to proclaim the wonderful works of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 *Pet* 2:9).

Yet behind the conversation in which Peter makes his profession of faith, there is another question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (*Mt* 16:13). This is no trivial matter. In fact, it concerns an important aspect of our ministry: the reality in which we live, with its limitations and potential, its questions and its convictions.

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (*Mt 16:13*). Reflecting on this scene, we can identify two possible responses to this question, which correspond to two different attitudes.

First, there is the response of the world. Matthew tells us that this conversation between Jesus and his disciples about his identity takes place in the beautiful town of Caesarea Philippi, full of luxurious buildings, nestled in a breathtaking natural setting at the foot of Mount Hermon... But also home to cruel circles of power, a stage for betrayal and unfaithfulness. This image speaks to us of a world that regards Jesus as completely irrelevant; as, at best, a curious figure who amazes with his unusual way of speaking and acting. But when his presence becomes bothersome, with the demands of honesty and moral integrity that it entails, this “world”

does not hesitate to reject and eliminate Him.

Then there is the other possible response to Jesus' question: that of ordinary people. To them, the Nazarene is no "charlatan": He is an upright man, courageous, eloquent, someone who speaks the truth, like other great prophets in the history of Israel. That's why they follow Him, at least as long as they can do so without too much risk or inconvenience. But they still see Him as merely a man, and so, at the time of danger, during the Passion, they too abandon Him and walk away, disillusioned.

What is striking about these two attitudes is how relevant they still are. We easily find these ideas on the lips of many men and women today, perhaps expressed in different words, but the same in substance.

Even now, there are many contexts in which the Christian faith is considered absurd, fit only for weak or unintelligent people; contexts where people prefer other forms of security, like technology, money, success, power, or pleasure.

These are environments where it is not easy to witness to and proclaim the Gospel; where believers are ridiculed, opposed, disdained, or at best, tolerated or pitied. Yet precisely because of this, these are places where mission is most urgent, because the absence of faith often brings with it great suffering: the loss of meaning in life, forgetting of mercy, violations of human dignity in tragic ways, the crisis of the family, and many other wounds from which our society deeply suffers.

Nor are we lacking in contexts where Jesus – even though people admire Him as a man – is reduced to a kind

of charismatic leader or superman. And this happens not only among nonbelievers but also among many baptized people who, on this level, end up living in a kind of practical atheism.

This is the world entrusted to us, the world in which, as Pope Francis has taught us so often, we are called to witness to the joyful faith in Christ the Savior. Therefore, it is essential for us, too, to repeat: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*Mt* 16:16).

It is essential to do so first and foremost in our personal relationship with Him, in our daily commitment to conversion. But also as a Church, by living together our belonging to the Lord and bringing the Good News to everyone (cf. Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, no. 1).

I say this first of all for myself, as the Successor of Peter, at the beginning

of this mission of mine as Bishop of the Church in Rome, called, in the famous expression of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, to preside in charity over the universal Church (cf. *Letter to the Romans*, Greeting). He was brought in chains to this city, the place of his imminent martyrdom, and wrote to the Christians living here: “Then I shall truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world no longer sees my body” (*Letter to the Romans*, IV, 1). He was referring to being devoured by wild beasts in the arena. And that is exactly what happened. But his words also point, in a broader sense, to an indispensable commitment for anyone who exercises a ministry of authority in the Church: to disappear so that Christ may remain; to become small so that He may be known and glorified (cf. *Jn* 3:30); to give oneself entirely so that no one may be deprived of the opportunity to know and love Him.

May God grant me this grace, today
and always, with the help of the
tender intercession of Mary, Mother
of the Church.

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(04/10/2026)