**Homily for the Eucharistic Celebration at the National Symposium on the New Evangelization***Bangalore (India), 09.03.2018*

Dear brothers and sisters,

Dear brothers in the priesthood and in the Episcopate,

Once again today, with great humility, we have come to listen to the Word of God that, during this time of Lent, wants to profoundly touch our lives, to change, renew, and transform them in God. We are very much in need of this transformation, especially when we gather around the Word of God as missionaries: if we do not first listen, in fact, we will not be able to preach. We cannot proclaim the Word of God if we do not first receive it with an open heart.

For this reason, even for us today, the first commandment is, “Listen Israel”, as we heard in the Gospel. “Listen”, dear assembly gathered here today in Bangalore, listen to what God wants to tell you. All of our gatherings, consultations, and deliberations are useless if they are not preceded by our listening to the Word of God, if first we do not discover the Will of God, if we first do not orient ourselves to the call He addresses to His Church. Therefore, I would like to begin by emphasizing that the primacy of the mission consists in listening to the Word of God, because the Church does not evangelize in and of itself, that is, by her own strength. Neither does she evangelize to share her own message. No: the Church evangelizes because she has first listened to what God has to say, which is, in turn, the message that she proclaims. “An evangelizer by nature, the Church always begins by evangelizing herself. A disciple of the Lord Jesus, she listens to his Word, from which she draws the reasons for the hope that does not disappoint, because it is founded on the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5)” (Pope Francis, Address in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 3 December 2015). What God has to say has been revealed to us in Christ: He is the Word that God addresses to us. Therefore, we must look to the person of Christ every time we evangelize. In fact, even today we are asked to make an act of faith and say with St. Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”. According to tradition, the Apostle Thomas brought this profession of faith here to India, and once again today we desire to make it our own, to be able to be authentic evangelizers. Our mission will bear fruit in the measure in which it echoes the great “Word” that God addressed to us in Christ. I believe that it is important, precisely today, to reiterate the centrality of Christ’s message, both for our personal and for our ecclesial life: He is the Lord, before whom “every knee must bend, in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth” (Phil 2:10), and that “every tongue” is called to proclaim. For us, making this act of faith in Christ means welcoming Him fully into our lives, that is, accepting His guidance, His authority, His forgiveness, His friendship, His consideration and way of evaluating other individuals and situations. For this reason we receive Him today in the sacrament of the Eucharist, true Body and Blood of Christ: so that assuming Him physically in us may strengthen our assuming Him in our whole existence with an abandonment that is increasingly perfect, free, and open to His Will.

Perhaps the scribe in today’s Gospel lacked precisely that last “yes” of faith. Jesus, in fact, told him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mt 12:34). But for us who, by listening to the Word, have matured the “yes” of faith, for us who have thus accepted the Kingdom of God that is Christ sent by the Father among us, for us this first commandment regarding our love towards God and towards our neighbor acquires its full light. Because the commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as oneself is not human but divine, and therefore a divine gaze is necessary to be able to fulfill it. We often talk about love, and we do so because it is the most beautiful, the most desirable, the most fulfilling of all human experiences. But the human experience of love also speaks of betrayals, suffering, and limitations. For this reason, the God that Christ has revealed to us takes our desire for love and fulfills it by giving us Jesus: in Him we can learn what it truly means to love. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). This is how Jesus has loved us, dying for us, physically giving up His live for us. This is love. This is why, to be part of the Kingdom, we must make an act of faith in Christ and ask Him: Help me to love as You have loved. Help me to love with all of my heart and with all of my soul, with all of my mind and with all of my strength. Grant that I may be so fully united to You that your love become my love. Grant me the grace to be interiorly transformed by Your love, so that I may witness this love to others.

Dear brothers, you very well know how much need there is for this love, especially in the solitude of the modern man, in the infinite misery of countless persons, in the daily sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters who have no bread, who have no family, who have no hope. And we know that this need is so great that only a divine love will be able to satisfy it. Human love is not enough. Hence, first the Jewish and then the Christian revelation have united the love for God, the love for one’s neighbor, and the love of oneself. Without the reciprocal experience of the love of God, there cannot be true love for oneself and for one’s neighbor, and without the tangible experience of my love towards another, the love of God is not manifested. Here in India I cannot but make reference to an important figure that incarnates all that I have told you and, through her example, explains it much better than my words: Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Could we explain her love without reference to Christ? No. Could we explain her experience of faith without reference to her testimony of charity? No. That is why the Gospel that we have heard today introduces us into the heart of our belonging to Christ, into the very core of our baptism: to look to Christ and to listen to Him, in order to be able to love as He has loved. To love God doing His Will. To love our brothers and sisters becoming their servant. This is a beautiful proposal of conversion during this time of Lent. If we want – like the prophet Hosea in the first reading – our desert to flourish, if we want our work of evangelization to bear fruit, if we want that the world be saved, let us return to Christ and let ourselves be loved by Him in order to then bear witness of this love to others. May this always be the true goal of our evangelization. Amen