

A spontaneous and sincere testimony of a bishop on an Ad Limina visit

Finding myself near the Pope

Mgr. Mário Spaki

Sitting next to Pope Francis in one of the beautiful and welcoming rooms in the Vatican, I was able to follow his every movement, even his breathing, for three hours and ten minutes.

I was struck by many things during that meeting, how everything remained the same but somehow constantly seemed to be new: his fatherly affection and his personal attention to everyone, his way of looking and speaking with tenderness, with a serenity and tranquillity that took away any sense of fear or intimidation.

One could see in him a certainty and sureness where he understood himself as being a servant called to love, fully aware of the power he has and with a sense of accomplishing what he has to do in God's good time. He said: "I wrote it, I will do it ...", but - I said to myself - each of these decisions affects the whole world. In reality, he is well aware of that but he acts with simplicity. Even from a distance he does not look his 83 years. He does not seem to feel tired or appear to be in pain or troubled by any anxiety or worry ...

Pope Francis had a great impact on me, not just because of his words. I felt transformed by what I saw: humility, love that warms and enlightens, the simplicity of a child of the Gospel and at the same time the firmness of the prophet for whom only the truth remains. I saw his total trust in God, his joy and delicacy, his unquestioned and contagious faith, his hope and certainty.

His decisions, guided by the Spirit of God, are not conditioned by the clamour of people or the world. He sees things in God and acts promptly. Without hesitation. He made us feel that he is not afraid of anything, neither the past nor the future. In fact, each of us could ask any question he wanted, without any restrictions. He did not place any conditions on us.

As I saw him sitting among us, the image of the Master who was teaching his disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee passed through my heart. With a sense of inner gratitude, I felt myself to be there among the group of twelve. What a blessing! I would have liked time to standstill and stay there, perhaps in silence, like Peter who suggested "making three tents".

At the end of that unforgettable moment, the pope asked us: "Pray for me, don't leave me alone!" I felt very moved at that point and I realised that he is human like you and me!

All of this had happened for the good of the Church in Paraná, the region of Brazil from which our group of bishops had come on their ad limina visit, so that, when we left we would do so transformed. We would be more *Jesus* among the people!