Edited by the Dicastery for Communication of the Holy See

STRONG IN THE FACE OF TRIBULATION

The Church in Communion: A Sure Support in Time of Trial

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00120 Città del Vaticano
Tel. 06.698.45780 - Fax 06.698.84716
E-mail: commerciale.lev@spc.va

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Introduction

The grave situation in which many countries throughout the world have plunged, due to the very rapid spread of Covid-19, puts us all to the test. Unfortunately, we know that this crisis will not be resolved quickly, and that the pandemic is spreading. We are facing a state of affairs that until just a few weeks ago would have seemed unimaginable, like the premise of a science fiction film.

Everything has suddenly changed. What we previously took for granted seems to be uncertain: the way we relate with others at work, how we manage our emotions, study, recreation, prayer, even the possibility of attending Mass…

In any case, the most serious aspect is that this epidemic – like every epidemic – is not only a threat to habits formed over time.I It is, above all, the cause of many deaths, of great pain, and great suffering. Thousands of people are gravely ill, thousands have died. Many families mourn their loved ones, to whom they were unable to stay close, to whom they were unable to say farewell, and who were cremated without the possibility of a funeral.

A characteristic of death in the time of Covid-19 is indeed solitude, the impossibility of having one's loved ones close by, the impossibility of receiving the Sacraments, of going to confession, of being accompanied in one's last breath by a friendly voice other than that of doctors or nurses working in hospital wards, pushed to their limits. We all owe a debt of gratitude to them, as they fight on the front line for people's lives every day. Alongside them, we must remember civil servants, those who pro-

vide strategic activities, the many volunteers who continue to help those most in need, the elderly who are alone, and the poor. Also to be remembered are the many priests, and men and women religious who share the sufferings of their people. Many of them have sacrificed their lives.

For many members of the faithful, the impossibility of participating in the liturgy and partaking of the Sacraments aggravates this condition of uncertainty, discomfort and confusion, even though the Church invites us to renew our faith in the Risen Christ, who conquered death, and made it the place of the sure encounter with the loving face of the Father. The present difficulties have stimulated the creativity and inventiveness of many priests, who by using the new means of communication, make themselves present in the life of their communities and families confined to their homes in semi-deserted cities.

The evidence of what is happening demands that we to live this time for the benefit of all, especially for those most at risk, in the solitude of our homes, hospitals and nursing homes. Of course, the questions of faith remain, for not even as believers have we been educated recently to live through such crises, to experience ecclesial communion in spite of separation and distance, without yielding to the temptation of an entirely personal devotion.

It is useful to remember that it is certainly not the first time that humanity, and Christians, have found themselves facing these types of events. Christian faith, lived daily in its essential elements, generates an outlook on reality. It provides the possibility of glimpsing the hand of a God Who is a good Father and Who has loved us so much that He sacrificed His Son for us. The Church thus bears in the treasury of her living tradition, a treasury of wisdom,

of hope, the opportunity to continue to experience – in solitude or even in isolation – that we are truly "one" thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit.

This book is intended to be a little help offered to all, so as to know how to discern and experience God's closeness and tenderness in pain, in suffering, in solitude and in fear. Of course, faith does not eliminate pain; ecclesial communion does not eliminate anguish. Rather, it does illuminate reality and reveal that it is pervaded by the love and hope based not on our abilities, but on the One Who is faithful and never abandons us.

The text is divided into three sections.

In the first we find prayers, rituals and supplications for difficult moments. They are texts that originate from various ecclesial contexts and historical eras. For this reason, they can be a further source of sharing at the level of the universal Church. There are prayers for the sick, for liberation from evil, to surrender ourselves trustfully to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Then there is a second part, which gathers together the indications given by the Church to continue to live and to receive the grace of the Lord, the gift of forgiveness and the Eucharist, the power of the Easter liturgies even though we are unable to participate physically in the Sacraments.

Finally, the third part consists of the words the Holy Father Francis has pronounced since 9 March in order to sustain the entire ecclesial community in this time of trial: they are primarily the daily homilies of the Mass at Santa Marta, and the texts of the Sunday Angelus. Listening to his words helps us to reflect and to hope; it helps us feel in communion with Peter and united to him.

This book, which the Holy See's Dicastery for Communication decided to prepare and make available to all, has a fundamental characteristic: it will be constantly updated with. new homilies and other interventions made by the Pope, and the "rediscovery" of other treasures from our ecclesial tradition. The book will, therefore, be published on the Libreria Editrice Vaticana website in PDF format, and can be downloaded free of charge. However, several times a week it will be updated and made available to download in the new updated version, with the addition of the new texts.

On the cover there is an image of the Archangel Michael, who protects the Church against evil and sustains us in this difficult trial, so that this evil may not prejudice our trust in the Father and the solidarity among us, but rather become an opportunity to look at what is truly essential for our lives and to share the love received from God among us all, and in a special way with those who are most in need today.

Andrea Tornielli

The prayer of the Church in difficult times*

The universality of intercession

* This section brings together various prayers and rituals through which the Church, in her different traditions, asks the Father for the grace, the strength and the gift of freedom from evil and from calamities.

Extraordinary moment of prayer before Saint Peter's Basilica[1]

The Holy Father:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
R. Amen.

The Holy Father:

Let us pray.
Almighty and merciful God,
behold our sorrowful condition:
comfort your children and open our hearts to hope,
so that we might feel your Fatherly
presence in our midst.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
R. Amen.

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[1] The following are the texts of the supplications of the prayer led by the Holy Father Francis in front of Saint Peter's Basilica for the liberation of the world from the Covid-19 pandemic. The text of the homily delivered during the celebration is given at the end of this book, in the paragraph referring to the words pronounced by Pope Francis on 27 March 2020. For the video of the celebration, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtxP7Ya98uk

Litany of Supplication

We adore you, O Lord
True God and true man, truly present in this holy Sacrament.
R. We adore you, O Lord
Our Saviour, God with us, faithful and rich in mercy
R. We adore you, O Lord
King and Lord of creation and of history
R. We adore you, O Lord
Conqueror of sin and death
R. We adore you, O Lord
Friend of humankind, the Risen One, the Living One who sits at the right hand of the Father.
R. We adore you, O Lord

We believe in you, O Lord
Only begotten Son of the Father, descended from heaven for our salvation
R. We believe in you, O Lord
Heavenly physician, who bows down over our misery
R. We believe in you, O Lord
Lamb who was slain, who offer yourself to rescue us from evil
R. We believe in you, O Lord
Good Shepherd, who give your life for the flock which you love
R. We believe in you, O Lord
Living bread and medicine for immortality, who give us eternal life
R. We believe in you, O Lord

Deliver us, O Lord

From the power of Satan and the seductions of the world
R. Deliver us, O Lord

From the pride and presumption of being able to do anything without you
R. Deliver us, O Lord
From the deceptions of fear and anxiety
R. Deliver us, O Lord
From unbelief and desperation
R. Deliver us, O Lord
From hardness of heart and the incapacity to love
R. Deliver us, O Lord

Save us, O Lord

From every evil that afflicts humanity
R. Save us, O Lord
From hunger, from famine and from egoism
R. Save us, O Lord
From illnesses, epidemics and the fear of our brothers and sisters
R. Save us, O Lord
From devastating madness, from ruthless interests and from violence
R. Save us, O Lord
From being deceived, from false information and the manipulation of consciences
R. Save us, O Lord

Comfort us, O Lord

Protect your Church which crosses the desert
R. Comfort us, O Lord
Protect humanity terrified by fear and anguish
R. Comfort us, O Lord
Protect the sick and the dying, oppressed by loneliness

R. Comfort us, O Lord
Protect doctors and healthcare providers exhausted by the difficulties they are facing
R. Comfort us, O Lord
Protect politicians and decision makers who bear the weight of having to make decisions
R. Comfort us, O Lord

Grant us your Spirit, O Lord

In the hour of trial and from confusion
R. Grant us your Spirit, O Lord
In temptation and in our fragility
R. Grant us your Spirit, O Lord
In the battle against evil and sin
R. Grant us your Spirit, O Lord
In the search for what is truly good and true joy
R. Grant us your Spirit, O Lord
in the decision to remain in you and in your friendship
R. Grant us your Spirit, O Lord

Open us to hope, O Lord

Should sin oppress us
R. Open us to hope, O Lord
Should hatred close our hearts
R. Open us to hope, O Lord
Should sorrow visit us
R. Open us to hope, O Lord
Should indifference cause us anguish
R. Open us to hope, O Lord
Should death overwhelm us
R. Open us to hope, O Lord.

Prayer for Liberation from the Epidemic to Our Lady of Divine Love[2]

O Mary,
You shine continuously on our journey
as a sign of salvation and hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who, at the cross, united with Jesus' pain,
keeping your faith firm.

You, Salvation of the Roman people,
know what we need,
and we trust that you will provide for those needs so that,
as at Cana of Galilee,
joy and celebration may return
after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the will of the Father
and to do what Jesus tells us.
He who took our sufferings upon Himself
and burdened Himself with our sorrows
to bring us, through the Cross,
to the joy of Resurrection. Amen.

Sub tuum praesidium

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger. O glorious and blessed Virgin.

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[2] Video Message of Pope Francis for the day of prayer and fasting for liberation from the epidemic, on 11 March 2020. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/D2wxD3YvfeQ

ORDERS OF BLESSINGS[3]

Order for a blessing in Various Circumstances

When the community has gathered, the minister says:

In the name of the Father' and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit .

All make the sign of the cross and reply:
Amen.

The minister who is a priest or deacon greets those present with these or other suitable words, taken mainly from sacred Scripture.

May God, who is the fountain of all goodness, be with you all.

All make the following or some other suitable reply:
And also with you.

A lay minister greets those present in the following words

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[3] The following *Orders of Blessings* are taken from the *Book of Blessings*, edited by the United States of America Bishops Conference (1989), which collects prayers and rites of blessing for different circumstances in life. Here are available excepts from *The Order for a Blessing in Various Circumstances* (*Book of Blessings*, nn. 1245-1271) and excepts from *The Order for the Blessing of the Sick* (*Book of Blessings*, nn. 380-398. 406). The complete rites are available in The Book of Blessings, edited by The United States of America Bishops Conference, 1989. The present order may be used by a priest or deacon. It may also be used by a layperson, who follows the rites and prayers designated for a lay minister. 1245-1271.

Brothers and sisters,

let us bless and praise the Lord, the fountain of all goodness. Blessed be God now and for ever.

All reply:
Amen.

In the following or similar words, the minister prepares those present for the blessing.

All that God has created and sustains, all the events he guides, and all human works that are good and have a good purpose, prompt those who believe to praise and bless the Lord with hearts and voices. He is the source and origin of every blessing. By this celebration we proclaim our belief that alt things work together for the good of those who fear and love God. We are sure that in all things we must seek the help of God, so that in complete reliance on his will we may in Christ do everything for his glory.

A reader, another person present, or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture.

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the apostle Paul to the Colossians (1:9b-l 4)

We do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance

of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Or:

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans (8:24-28):

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Or:

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the first letter of Paul to Timothy (4:4-5):

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected when received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the invocation of God in prayer.

Or:

Numbers 6:22-27; Deuteronomy 33:1, 13b-16a; Wisdom 13:1-7; Sirach 18:1 -9.

As circumstances suggest, one of the following responsorial psalms may be sung or said, or some other suitable song.

R. The Lord led his people out with rejoicing.

Psalm 105

Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name
make known among the nations his deed;.
Sing to him, sing his praise
proclaim all his wondrous deeds. **R.**

Glory in his holy name;
rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord!
Look to the Lord in his strength;
seek to serve him constantly. **R.**

Recall the wondrous deeds that be bas wrought
his portents, and the judgments he has uttered.
He, the Lord, is our God; · ·
throughout the earth his judgments prevail. **R.**

He remembers forever his covenant
which he made binding for a thousand generations
Which he entered into with Abraham
and by his oath to Isaac. **R.**

Psalm 106:2-3, 4-5, 45-46, 47,48

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good his love is everlasting.

Psalm 107:2-3, 8-9, 31-32, 42-43

R. They cried to the Lord in their troubles and he delivered them from their anguish.

Intercessions

As circumstances suggest, the prayer of blessing may be preceded by the intercessions. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. From the following intentions those best suited to the occasion may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to the particular circumstances may be composed.

The minister says :

God loves his creation and his goodness sustains the universe. Let us pray now that he will bestow his blessing upon us and that he will renew and support us with his strength.

R. Lord, send us your blessing.

Or:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

Assisting minister:

Everlasting God, you give life a nobler meaning when we try wholeheartedly to do your will; fill us with the spirit of your own holiness. (For this we pray:) **R.**

Assisting minister:

You want us to increase your gifts and to return them to you and to our neighbor; accept the offering of our loving service. (For this we pray:) **R.**

Assisting minister:

You watch over us with fatherly care; hear the cries of those who trust in you. (For this we pray:) **R.**

Assisting minister:

You sent your Son into the world to remove the curse of sin and replace it with your blessing; in Christ fill us with every heavenly blessing. (For this we pray:) **R.**

Assisting minister:

You have poured forth into our hearts your Son's Spirit, in whom we cry out, Abba, Father; hear your children as they acclaim and praise your goodness (For this we pray:) **R.**

Assisting minister:

Through your Son's death and resurrection you have chosen us to be your people and your inheritance; remember us in our needs and bless your inheritance. (For this we pray:) **R.**

When there are no intercessions, the minister, before the prayer of blessing, says:

Let us pray.

As circumstances suggest all may they pray for a moment in silence before the prayer of blessing

A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

Lord,
let the effect of your blessing
remain with your faithful people
to give them new life and strength of spirit,
so that the power of your love
will enable them to accomplish what is right and good.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Or:

Lord,
we, your people, pray for the gift of your holy blessing
to ward off every harm
and to bring to fulfillment every right desire.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

A minister who is a priest or deacon concludes the rite by saying:

May God, who is blessed above all, bless you in all things through Christ, so that whatever happens in your lives will work together for our good.

R. Amen

Then he blesses all present.

And may almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, ✠ and the Holy Spirit.

R. Amen

A lay minister concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:

May God, who is blessed above all, bless us in all things through Christ, so that whatever happens in our lives will work together for our good.

R. Amen.

Order for the Blessing of the Sick[4]

When the community has gathered, the minister says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All make the sign of the cross and reply:
Amen.

A minister who is a priest or a deacon greets those present in the following or other suitable words, taken mainly from sacred Scripture.

Peace be with you (this house) and all who live here.

Or:

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

All make the following or some other suitable reply.

And also with you.

A lay minister greets those present in the following words.

Brothers and sisters,

let us bless the Lord, who went about doing good
and healing the sick. Blessed be God now and for ever.

R. Blessed be God now and for ever.

---

[4] The blessing of the sick by the ministers of the Church is a very ancient custom, having its origins in the practice of Christ himself and his apostles. The present order may be used by a priest or deacon. It may also be used by a layperson, who follows the rites and prayers designated for a lay minister. This blessing is proposed in both long and short forms.

Or:

R. Amen.

In the following or similar words, the minister prepares the sick and all present for the blessing.

The Lord Jesus, who went about doing good works and healing sickness and infirmity of every kind, commanded his disciples to care for the sick, to pray for them, and to lay hands on them. In this celebration we shall entrust our sick brothers and sisters to the care of the Lord, asking that he will enable them to bear their pain and suffering in the knowledge that, if they accept their share in the pain of his own passion, they will also share in its power to give comfort and strength.

A reader, another person present, or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture. The readings chosen should be those that best apply to the physical and spiritual condition of those who are sick.

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the second letter of Paul
to the Corinthians: 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God oft all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we

suffer. Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement.

Or:

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Matthew: 11:28-30

Jesus said to the crowds: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Or:

Brothers and sisters,

listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Mark: 6:53-56

After making the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and tied up there. As they were leaving the boat, people immediately recognized him. They scurried about the surrounding country and began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Whatever villages or towns or countryside he entered, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak; and as many as touched it were healed.

As circumstances suggest, one of the following responsorial psalms may be sung or said, or some other suitable song. Lord, you have preserved my life from destruction.

Isaiah 38

Once I said, "
In the noontime of life I must depart!
To the gates of the nether world I shall be consigned
for the rest of my years." **R.**

I said, "I shall see the LORD no more
in the land of the living.
No longer shall I behold my fellow men
among those who dwell in the world." **R.**

My dwelling, like a shepherd's tent,
is struck down and borne away from me;
You have folded up my life, like a weaver
who severs the last thread. **R.**

Those live whom the LORD protects;
yours . . . the life of my spirit.
You have given me health and life. **R.**

Psalm 102:2-3, 24-25

R. (v. 2) O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to you.

Intercessions

The intercessions are then said. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. From the following intentions those best suited to the occasion may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to those who are sick and to the particular circumstances may be composed.

The minister says:

The Lord Jesus loves our brothers and sisters who are ill. With trust let us pray to him that he will comfort them with his grace, saying:

R. Lord, give those who are sick the comfort of your presence.

Assisting minister:

Lord Jesus, you came as healer of body and of spirit, in order to cure all our ills. **R .**

Assisting minister:

You were a man of suffering, but it was our infirmities that you bore, our sufferings that you endured. **R.**

Assisting minister:

You chose to be like us in all things, in order to assure us of your compassion. **R.**

Assisting minister:

You experienced the weakness of the flesh in order to deliver us from evil. **R.**

Assisting minister:

At the foot of the cross your Mother stood as companion in your sufferings, and in your tender care you gave her to us as our Mother. **R.**

Assisting minister:

It is your wish that in our own flesh we should fill up what is wanting in your sufferings for the sake of your Body, the Church. **R.**

Instead of the intercessions or in addition to them, one of the following litanies taken from Pastoral Care of the Sick, nos. 245 and 138, may be used.

Minister:

You bore our weakness and carried our sorrows:

Lord, have mercy.

R. Lord, have mercy.

Minister:

You felt compassion for the crowd, and went about doing good and healing the sick: Christ, have mercy.

R. Christ, have mercy.

Minister:

You commanded your apostles to lay their hands on the sick in your name: Lord, have mercy.

R. Lord, have mercy.

Or:

The minister says:

Let us pray to God for our brothers and sisters and for all those who devote themselves to caring for them.

Assisting minister:

Bless N. and N: and fill them with new hope and strength: Lord, have mercy.

R. Lord, have mercy.

Assisting minister:

Relieve their pain: Lord, have mercy. **R.**

Assisting minister:

Free them from sin and do not let them give way to temptation: Lord, have mercy. **R.**

Assisting minister:

Sustain all the sick with your power: Lord, have mercy. **R.**

Assisting minister:

Assist all who care for the sick: Lord, have mercy. **R.**

Assisting minister:

Give life and health to our brothers and sisters on whom we lay our hands in your name: Lord, have mercy. **R.**

Prayer of Blessing

A minister who is a priest or deacon may, as circumstances suggest, lay his hands on the head of each sick person, and then say the prayer of blessing.

Lord, our God,
you sent your Son into the world
to bear our infirmities
and to endure our sufferings.
For N. and N., your servants who are sick,
we ask that your blessing will give them strength
to overcome their weakness
through the power of patience and the comfort of hope
and that with your aid they will soon be restored to health.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Or, without the laying on of hands:

Lord Jesus,
who went about doing good and healing all,
we ask you to bless your friends who are sick.
Give them strength in body, courage in spirit, and patience with pain.
Let them recover their health,
so that, restored to the Christian community,

they may joyfully praise your name,
for you live and reign for ever and ever. **R.** Amen.

A lay minister traces the sign of the cross on the forehead of each sick person and says the following prayer of blessing.

Lord, our God,
who watch over your creatures with unfailing care,
keep us in the safe embrace of your love.
With your strong right hand raise up your servants
(N. and N.)
and give them the strength of your own power.
Minister to them and heal their illnesses,
so that they may have from you the help they long for.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Or, for one sick person:

Lord and Father, almighty and eternal God,
by your blessing you give us strength and support in our frailty:
turn with kindness toward this your servant N.
Free him/her from all illness and restore him/her to health,
so that in the sure knowledge of your goodness
he/she will gratefully bless your holy name.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

After the prayer of blessing, the minister invites all present to pray for the protection of the Blessed Virgin. They may do so by singing or reciting a Marian antiphon, for example, We turn to you for protection **(Sub tuum praesidium)** *or Hail, Holy Queen.*

Concluding Rites

A minister who is a priest or a deacon concludes the rite by facing the sick and saying:

May God the Father bless you.

R. Amen.

May God the Son comfort you.

R. Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit enlighten you.

R. Amen.

Then he blesses all present.
And may almighty God bless you all,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

R. Amen.

A lay minister invokes the Lord's blessing on the sick and all present by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:

May the Lord Jesus Christ,
who went about doing good and healing the sick,
grant that we may have good health
and be enriched by his blessings.

R. Amen.

C. Shorter Rite

The minister says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All reply:

Who made heaven and earth.

One of those present or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

Matthew 11:28-29

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.";

As circumstances suggest, a minister who is a priest or deacon may lay hands on the sick person while saying the prayer of blessing; a lay minister may trace the sign of the cross on the sick person's forehead while saying the prayer.

Lord and Father, almighty and eternal God,
by your blessing you give us strength and support in our frailty:
turn with kindness toward your servant, N.
Free him/her from all illness and restore him/her to health, so that in the sure knowledge of your goodness he/she will gratefully bless your holy name.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Akathistos hymn[5]

Biblical–liturgical section

1. The foremost of the Angels was sent down from Heaven
to say "Hail!" to the Mother of God.
At his greeting of spirit, not earth,
when he saw you made flesh in her womb,
saving Lord,
your Angel was joyful,
proclaiming your Mother's great praise:

2. Since well Mary knew of her virginal calling,
with courage to th'Angel she spoke:
"Your singular word of announcement seems strange
for my spirit to grasp and to know;
from the womb of a virgin a child you fortell,
as you cry: Alleluia!"

---

[5] It is one of the most famous hymns of the Greek Church dedicated to the Theotokos (Mother of God). *A-kathistos* in Greek means "not-seated", because it is sung or recited while standing as a sign of reverence for Mary, the Holy Mother of God. The structure is inspired by the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in chapters 21-22 of the Revelation to St. John. It sings Mary in her identification with the Church, the Virgin Bride of the Lamb. The hymn comprises 24 stanzas which is the numbers of letters in the Greek alphabet. It is planned in 2 parts - a narrative and a dogmatic one - in which the beauty of Mary, Mother of Christ and Believers, shines through.

Rejoice: through you is our joy made resplendent;
Rejoice: through you is our curse now eclipsed.
Rejoice, the saving of Adam who fell;
Rejoice, annulment of tears of Eve.
Rejoice, inaccessible summit beyond understanding;
Rejoice, wondrous deepness of depth for the knowledge of angels.
Rejoice, holy place where the King did establish His Throne;
Rejoice, who gave birth to the Life and sustainer of all.
Rejoice, the Star who announces the Dawn;
Rejoice, the Womb wherein God is made Flesh.
Rejoice, for through you is Creation made new;
Rejoice, for its Maker is a Child born through you.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

3. The Virgin then pondered
to enter the mystery
and asked of the Angel of God:
"How then can my virginal womb
ever bring forth a child to the world?
You must say!".
Then the Angel most reverently sang of her praises
and said:

4. The Power of the Highest
o'ershadowed and made Mother
the Virgin unknowing of man:
Her womb thus awakened by God,
did become a good field of rich life
unto all who are longing to welcome salvation
and sing forth in praise: Alleluia!

Rejoice, the guide to the planning of God:
Rejoice, the light of a mystery profound.
Rejoice, the first of the wonders of Christ;
Rejoice, in whom all His Truths are brought forth.
Rejoice, stair of Heaven, providing the pathway for God;
Rejoice, for you span the great gulf between Heaven and Man.
Rejoice, splendid sign whom the choirs of angels proclaim;
Rejoice, fearful scourge of the legions and powers of ill.
Rejoice, o Bearer of ineffable Light;
Rejoice: sole keeper of the means of this sign.
Rejoice, ever greater than knowledge of sages;
Rejoice, in the hearts of the faithful you shine.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

5. With the Lord in her womb,
holy Mary most caring,
paid visit and greeted her cousin.
The child whom Elizabeth bore heard
the words that the Virgin pronounced
and was glad,
and with dance for his song he gave praise
to the Mother of God:

6. With his heart in great turmoil,
his thoughts much opposed,
wise Joseph turned backwards and forth:
while secing you still ever pure,
he feared that you may have been faithless,
o Virgin!
But once having heard of your Child
hrough the Spirit,
he exclaimed: Alleluia!

Rejoice, o branch of a root that is holy;
Rejoice, the tree with most perfect of Fruit.
Rejoice, you nurture the God of creation;
Rejoice, producing the Planter of life.
Rejoice, holy field bearing fruit$ of abundance of mercies;
Rejoice, too, the table o'erladen with heavenly gifts.
Rejoice, for you bring shoots of life to a land that was arid;
Rejoice, for you build for the faithful a refuge secure.
Rejoice, fine incense of all supplication;
Rejoice, sweet pardon for sorrowing World.
Rejoice, sign of mercy of God to our Race;
Rejoice, sign of hope of our Race before God.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

7. The Shepherds had heard
the great chorus of angels
singing of Christ in our Flesh.
They ran to behold Him the Shepherd,
and looked on Him,
innocent Lamb of the Lord,
being nourished by Mary the Virgin,
to whom they sang praise:

8. In heaven a star pointing out
the Eternal was followed by Wise Men in light.
For them a sure lantern of guidance,
it helped them to seek You, o God,
the Most High.
On attaining the Lord unattainable great was their cry:
Alleluia!

Rejoice, o Mother of Shepherd and Lamb;
Rejoice, the Fold for the Faithful of God.

Rejoice, o bolt barring evil assault;
Rejoice, the Key turning Heaven's own door.
Rejoice, for through you all the heavens exult with the earth;
Rejoice, for through you do the earth and the heav'n sing as one.
Rejoice, tireless voice of the chosen Apostles of God;
Rejoice, restless longing of Martyrs whose blood is for Christ.
Rejoice, o powerful foundation for Faith;
Rejoice, o wonderful ensign of Grace.
Rejoice, for through you evil Hell was laid bare;
Rejoice, for through you we re we clothed in God's glory.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

9. In the hands of His Mother
they saw Him at last, the great God,
whose own hand made us all.
Full well did they know He was Lord,
though hidden in form of a servant,
and gifts did they offer in kindness
and said to His Mother so blest:

10. The heralds of God did the Magi
become on the path back to Babylon bound.
Your prophecy, Lord, they fulfilled,
and your Name, saving Christ,
they announced to the world,
ever heedless of Herod, the foolish,
who never could sing: Alleluia!

Rejoice, o Mother of Sun without setting;
Rejoice, the dawning of spiritual Day.
Rejoice, extinguishing firebrands of falsehood;
Rejoice, o beacon to Trinity's Truth.

Rejoice, for you darken the throne of the Tyrant so hated;
Rejoice, for you show us the Christ of great mercy as Lord.
Rejoice: you absolve us from cruel and terrible rites;
Rejoice, for you save us from murk and the squalor of fate.
Rejoice: the worship of fire you destroy;
Rejoice: the burning of vice you extinguish.
Rejoice, clearest guide for the mind of believers;
Rejoice, purest joy of the world and its peoples.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

11. Shining forth into Egypt the splendour of Truth, you drove out the darkness of error:
at your Power of God, blessed Lord,
the Idols fell down in their weakness made naught.
And men being saved to the Mother of God
sang in praise:

12. On the point of departing
this world so deceiving was Simeon,
the watchman, inspired.
As a baby presented, so small,
yet as Lord in perfection
he knew You, o Christ,
and moved by the Wisdom Eternal,
he cried out in praise: Alleluia!

Rejoice, raising up of humanity fallen;
Rejoice, tearing down of the Underworld's Reign.
Rejoice: the trampling of lies and of error;
Rejoice, unmasking idolatry's fraud.
Rejoice, blessed ocean engulfing the Pharaoh supreme;
Rejoice, blessed rock pouring forth the sound waters of Life.
Rejoice, fiery pillar, a light in the darkness for all;

Rejoice, never cloud of protection will shield us like you.
Rejoice: you give us the Manna of Heaven;
Rejoice: you serve us the holiest of Food.
Rejoice, ever spiritual Land of His Promise;
Rejoice, ever flowing with honey and milk.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

13. The Maker of all made Creation
anew to appear amid us,
His dear children: the Lord blossomed forth
from the Virgin,
whose Womb He preserved
ever pure and unstained.
Thus thrilled by this wonder
we sing to the Virgin with joy:

14. Enthralled by His birth
we go forth from this world
to consider the wonders of heaven.
In humanity's lowliest likeness,
He came and was born in our midst,
the Most High,
to lead to the heavens all those who acclaim Him
with joy: Alleluia!

Rejoice, bright flower of a life uncorrupted;
Rejoice, chaste crown of possession of self.
Rejoice: awarding a glimpse of the Risen;
Rejoice, unveiling the life of the angels.
Rejoice, fairest plant bearing fruit to be food of the Faithful;
Rejoice, tree of beauty, whose shade is protection for all.
Rejoice: in your Womb you bore Him who would guide those who wander;

Rejoice: you brought forth to the light the Releaser of slaves.
Rejoice, People's plea to the righteous Judge;
Rejoice, forgiveness for all who are lost.
Rejoice, welcome garment for souls stripped of grace;
Rejoice, fullest love more than any desire.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

15. He came to His earth
yet the heav'ns still
were filled by God's Word
in His infinite glory.
Our God, not by changing His place,
but inclining most hambly in love to our race,
was born of the Virgin, the Mother,
to whom we declare:

16. Amazed were the angels
to witness the awesome event
of your bless'd Incarnation:
inaccessible God above all they saw giving access to us
in our Flesh, and dwelling with us,
so that each can acclaim You and cry: Alleluia!

Rejoice, o Throne of the infinite God;
Rejoice, the door of the Mystery sublime.
Rejoice, sure Truth which unsettles th'incredulous;
Rejoice, reliable boast for believers.
Rejoice, holy dwelling more holy than throne of the Cherubim;
Rejoice, precious vessel more blessed than throne of the Seraphim.
Rejoice: for in you are extremes of greatness united;
Rejoice: for together as one you are Virgin and Mother.

Rejoice: in you came forgiveness of sin;
Rejoice: in you Heaven's gates were flung wide.
Rejoice, blessed key of the Kingdom of Christ;
Rejoice, hopeful way to the tressure of God.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

17. The finest of speakers
are silent as fish before you,
holy Mother of God.
Never word from their lips
will express how a Mother you are,
yet a Virgin remain.
But we, full of wonder can sing
of the Mystery in faith:

18. To save the creation the Lord
of the universe freely
came down to the earth.
The God, who was always our Shepherd,
now chose to appear in our midst as the Lamb;
in our image He called us whose image we are,
thus we pray: Alleluia!

Rejoice, o vessel of Wisdom Eternal;
Rejoice, the treasure of God's loving care.
Rejoice: you show how the clever are foolish;
Rejoice: you send into silence the wise.
Rejoice: before you subtle schemes of disputors are stupid;
Rejoice: before you mortal myths and their makers are empty.
Rejoice: all the sophists are snared in confusion by you;
Rejoice: simple fishermen catch their fulfillment in you.

Rejoice: you draw us from depths of dark error;
Rejoice, great lighthouse to lead us to Truth.
Rejoice, saving vessel for those who seek Rescue;
Rejoice, port and haven on seaways of life.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

19. Defender of virgins
who follow your way,
are you, blessed Virgin and Mother:
for thus, Purest Creature,
He made you,
the Lord who holds sway over Heaven and Earth,
as He dwelt in your Womb
while inviting us all to proclaim:
20. No song has been written
that ever could equal your numberless graces, o Lord.
Indeed, were we offering canticles countless
as grains in the sand of the sea,
we never could compass your gifts
to your servants,
who sing: Alleluia!

Rejoice, blest column of holy virginity;
Rejoice, o passage and portal to Rescue.
Rejoice, beginning of birth for the spirit;
Rejoice: bringing forth all the bounty of God.
Rejoice: you have given back Life to those born in disgrace;
Rejoice, for in you have the foolish found fulness of wisdom.
Rejoice: the Seducer of Hearts was made pow'rless byYou;
Rejoice: the Begetter of Chastity touched us through you.
Rejoice: where Heaven and Earth are encoupled;
Rejoice: where Faithful and Lord are made one.

Rejoice, loving Woman: you nourish all virgins;
Rejoice, holy Maid: you lead brides to the Groom.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

21. We look to the Virgin most holy,
the beacon who brightens the camp of our darkness.
In her shines the light of God's presence:
she shows us the way to the knowledge of God.
A splendour is she for our minds
as all praise her with song:
22. His wish to redeem
that most ancient of Debts
brought the Saviour to dwell in our midst.
In His person was payment for all,
who had lost every title to gift of God's Grace.
He cancelled Sin's charter and therefore
we chant in His praise: Allelula!

Rejoice, bright ray of the Sunlight of Heaven;
Rejoice, the beam of a Light never setting.
Rejoice, clear lightning to flash in our minds;
Rejoice, o thunder of fear for our foes.
Rejoice, for from you comes the Light who illumines the world;
Rejoice, blessed spring giving manifold waters of Life.
Rejoice, Pool of Healing where people were bathed as of old;
Rejoice, for in you comes the One who now washes our sins.
Rejoice, bless'd Font where our souls are made pure;
Rejoice, the cup overflowing with joy:
Rejoice, pleasant fragrance of Christ who anoints us;
Rejoice, from whose life comes the Mystical Banquet.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

23. At the birth of your Son
all His creatures rejoice,
Living Temple, o Bearer of God.
Your Womb was the worthiest dwelling of Him
who holds all in His hand as the Lord.
Most haly and glorious
He made you and taught us to sing:

24. O merciful Mother:
who bear us the greatest of Saints,
God's own Word ever holy:
accept, in your kindness, our song!
From every misfortune and malice preserve us!
From threatening punishment free us,
your children who call: Alleluia!

Rejoice, o Tent where God's Word finds repose;
Rejoice, excelling the "Holy of Holies".
Rejoice, the Ark that the Spirit has burnished;
Rejoice, unfailing rich treasure of Life.
Rejoice, precious crown: saintly Rulers acclaim you their glory;
Rejoice, noble banner: good priests all proclaim you their boast.
Rejoice, mighty fortress defending the Church of the Lord;
Rejoice, wall of strength for protecting the Nations of God.
Rejoice: through you spoils of vict'ry are raised;
Rejoice: through you the great enemies fall.
Rejoice, healing remedy, curing my weakness;
Rejoice, for my soul finds salvation with you.
Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

The "Stella Caeli Extirpavit" Chant in Time of Pestilence[6]

The Star of Heaven that nourished the Lord
drove away the plague of death
which the first parents of man brought into the world.
May this bright Star now vouchsafe to extinguish
that foul constellation whose battles have
slain the people with the wound of death.
O Glorious Star of the Sea,
preserve us from pestilence;
hear us, O Lady, for Thy Son honours
Thee by denying Thee nothing.
Save us, O Jesus,
for whom Thy Virgin Mother supplicates Thee.
O most pious Star of the Sea, preserve us from pestilence;
hear us, O Lady,
for Thy Son honors Thee by denying Thee nothing.
Save us,
O Jesus, for whom Thy Virgin Mother supplicates Thee

[6] Ancient hymn asking for an end to pestilence, within the Franciscan tradition. The source of the chant can be traced back to the seraphic tradition of the Franciscans: Cf https://sspx.org/en/news-events/news/stella-coeli-extirpavit-prayer-our-lady-times-pestilence-56625.

Saint Patrick's Breastplate[7]

I arise today through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to see before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to secure me –
against snares of devils,
against temptations and vices,
against inclinations of nature,
against everyone who shall wish me
ill, afar and anear,
alone and in a crowd...

Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit,

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[7] *St Patrick's Breastplate* is a prayer beseeching protection. It is also known as "*The Deer's Cry*", the "*Lorica of St Patrick*", or "*St Patrick's Hymn*". Tradition attributes it's authorship to St Patrick who composed it during his ministry to the people of Ireland in the 5th century.

Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
May your salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.

Act of offering[8]

Lord, what You will let it be so
Where You will there we will go
What is Your will help us to know

Lord, when You will the time is right
In You there's joy in strife
For Your will I'll give my life

To ease Your burden brings no pain
To forego all for You is gain
As long as I in You remain

Because You will it, it is best
Because You will it, we are blest
Till in Your hands our hearts find rest
Till in Your hands our hearts find rest

[8] Blessed Rupert Mayer, SJ (1876-1945), Jesuit priest: dedicated to fighting injustice, great preacher, who, beginning in the 1920s demonstrated the irreconcilable differences between the Christian Faith and National Socialism. He was arrested and interned in various concentration camps to the point that his health was seriously compromised. This is one of his prayers of trusting abandonment to the Lord in a time of difficulty.

What if I can't participate in the sacraments?

How to receive the grace of the Lord when unable to participate physically in liturgical celebrations

Forgiveness without a priest? The Pope reminds us how to receive it[9]

People dying without chaplains, families confined to their homes and unable to reach a priest because of the Covid-19 emergency: in his homily at Santa Marta, Pope Francis mentions the *Catechism* and the "contrition" that obtains forgiveness from sins while one waits to go to confession.

The *salus animarum*, the salvation of souls, is the supreme law of the Church. This is the fundamental interpretative criterion for determining what is right. This is why the Church always seeks, in every way, to offer the possibility of reconciliation with God to all those who desire it, who seek it, who await it or who, in any case, become aware of their condition and feel the need to be welcomed, loved and forgiven. In these times of emergency due to the pandemic, with people seriously ill and isolated in intensive care wards, and families who are asked to stay at home to avoid the spread of the virus, it is useful to remind everyone of the richness of the Church's tradition. Francis did this in his homily during Mass in Santa Marta on Friday, 20 March.

"I know that many of you, for Easter, go to confession so you can be right with God again", said the Pope.

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[9] *Vatican news,* 20 March 2020. Holy Mass presided over by Pope Francis at the Casa Santa Marta in the Vatican. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/F2X7QzEkCLg?t=5

"But, many will say to me today: 'But, Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, when I can't leave my house? And I want to make peace with the Lord, I want Him to embrace me, I want my Daddy to embrace me... What can I do if I can't find a priest?' You do what the Catechism says".

"It is very clear: if you cannot find a priest to whom you can confess," explained the Pontiff, "speak with God, He is your Father, and tell Him the truth: 'Lord, I have done this, this and this…. I am sorry", and ask Him for forgiveness with all your heart, with the Act of Contrition, and promise Him: 'Later I will go to confession, but forgive me now". You will return immediately to God's grace. You yourself can approach God's forgiveness as the Catechism teaches us, without having a priest at hand. Think about it: this is the moment! And this is the right moment, the appropriate moment. An Act of Contrition, made well. In this way our souls will become as white as snow".

Pope Francis refers to **numbers 1451 and 1452 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***, promulgated by Saint John Paul II and drafted under the guidance of the then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger. As far as "contrition" is concerned, the Catechism, citing the Council of Trent, teaches that among the acts of the penitent it "occupies first place. Contrition is sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again".

"When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called 'perfect' (contrition of charity)", continues the Catechism. "Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins

if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible". Therefore, while waiting to receive absolution from a priest as soon as circumstances permit, it is possible with this act to be immediately forgiven. This too was already affirmed by the Council of Trent, in chapter 4 of the *Doctrina de sacramento Paenitentiae*, where it is stated that contrition accompanied by the intention of confession is able to "reconcile man with God, even before this sacrament is truly received".

This is a way to approach God's mercy, and is open to all. It belongs to the Church's tradition and can be useful to everyone, especially at this time to those who are near the sick in their homes and hospitals.

Numbers 1451 and 1452 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Contrition

1451. Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again" [Council of Trent: Denz.-Schönm., 1676].

1452. When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible [cf. Council of Trent: Denz.-Schönm., 1677].

Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic

The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (*Rom* 12: 12). The words written by Saint Paul to the Church of Rome resonate throughout the entire history of the Church and guide the judgment of the faithful in the face of all suffering, sickness and calamity.

The present moment in which the whole of humanity, threatened by an invisible and insidious disease, which for some time now has become part of all our lives, is marked day after day by anguished fears, new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering.

The Church, following the example of her Divine Master, has always had the care of the sick at heart. As Saint John Paul II points out, the value of human suffering is twofold: "It is *supernatural* because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission" (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* , 31).

Pope Francis, too, in these recent days, has shown his paternal closeness and renewed his invitation to pray incessantly for those who are sick with the Coronavirus.

So that all those who suffer because of COVID-19, precisely in the mystery of this suffering, may rediscover "the same redemptive suffering of Christ" (*ibid* ., 30), this Apostolic Penitentiary, *ex auctoritate Summi Pontificis* , trusting in the word of Christ the Lord and considering with a spirit of faith the epidemic currently underway, to be lived in a spirit of personal conversion, grants the gift of Indulgences in accordance with the following disposition.

The Plenary Indulgence is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine

Redeemer: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (*Jn* 15: 13), will obtain the same gift of the Plenary Indulgence under the same conditions.

This Apostolic Penitentiary also willingly grants a *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions on the occasion of the current world epidemic, also to those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the Viaticum, entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, our Advocate, help suffering humanity, saving us from the evil of this pandemic and obtaining for us every good necessary for our salvation and sanctification.

The present Decree is valid notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on 19 March 2020.

Mauro Cardinal Piacenza
Major Penitentiary

Krzysztof Nykiel
Regent

«I am with you always»
(*Mt* 28: 20)

Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic

The gravity of the present circumstances calls for reflection on the urgency and centrality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, together with some necessary clarifications, both for the lay faithful and for ministers called to celebrate the Sacrament.

Even in the time of COVID-19, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is administered in accordance with universal canon law and with the provisions of the *Ordo Paenitentiae*.

Individual confession is the ordinary way of celebrating this sacrament (cf. can. 960 CIC), while collective absolution, without prior individual confession, cannot be imparted except where there is an imminent danger of death, since there is not enough time to hear the confessions of individual penitents (cf. can. 961, § 1 CIC), or a grave necessity (cf. can. 961, § 1 CIC). 961, § 1, 2 CIC), the consideration of which is the responsibility

of the diocesan bishop, taking into account the criteria agreed upon with the other members of the Episcopal Conference (cf. can. 455, § 2 CIC) and without prejudice to the necessity, for valid absolution, of *votum sacramenti* on the part of the individual penitent, that is to say, the purpose of confessing serious sins in due time, which at the time could not be confessed (cf. can. 962, § 1 CIC).

This Apostolic Penitentiary believes that, especially in the places most affected by the pandemic contagion and until the phenomenon recedes, the cases of serious need mentioned in can. 961, § 2 CIC above mentioned, will occur.

Any further specification is delegated by law to diocesan bishops, always taking into account the supreme good of the salvation of souls (cf. can. 1752 CIC).

Should there arise a sudden need to impart sacramental absolution to several faithful together, the priest is obliged to warn the diocesan bishop as far as possible or, if he cannot, to inform him as soon as possible (cf. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, n. 32).

In the present pandemic emergency, it is therefore up to the diocesan bishop to indicate to priests and penitents the prudent attentions to be adopted in the individual celebration of sacramental reconciliation, such as the celebration in a ventilated place outside the confessional, the adoption of a suitable distance, the use of protective masks, without prejudice to absolute attention to the safeguarding of the sacramental seal and the necessary discretion.

Furthermore, it is always up to the diocesan bishop to determine, in the territory of his own ecclesiastical circumscription and with regard to the level of pandemic contagion, the cases of grave necessity in which it is law-

ful to impart collective absolution: for example, at the entrance to hospital wards, where the infected faithful in danger of death are hospitalised, using as far as possible and with the appropriate precautions the means of amplifying the voice so that absolution may be heard.

Consideration should be given to the need and advisability of setting up, where necessary, in agreement with the health authorities, groups of "extraordinary hospital chaplains", also on a voluntary basis and in compliance with the norms of protection from contagion, to guarantee the necessary spiritual assistance to the sick and dying.

Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452).

Never before has the Church experienced thus the power of the communion of saints, raising to her Crucified and Risen Lord her vows and prayers, especially the Sacrifice of Holy Mass, celebrated daily, even without the presence of the people, by priests.

Like a good mother, the Church implores the Lord that humanity may be freed from such a scourge, invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy and Health of the Sick, and of her Spouse Saint Joseph, under whose patronage the Church has always walked the world.

May Mary Most Holy and Saint Joseph obtain for us abundant graces of reconciliation and salvation, in attentive listening to the Word of the Lord, which he repeats to humanity today: "Be still and know that I am God" (*Ps* 46: 10), "I am with you always" (*Mt* 28 :20).

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on March 19, 2020, Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of the Universal Church.

Mauro Cardinal Piacenza
Major Penitentiary

Krzysztof Nykiel
Regent

The spiritual communion

Those who are unable to make sacramental Communion with Christ by participating in the Eucharist, can express the desire to receive him in their spirit with these words that help to make spiritual communion with him:

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present
in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
I love you above all things and desire
to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen

Saint Alphonsus Liguori

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments regarding the celebration of the Easter Triduum

Decree

In time of Covid-19 (II)

Considering the rapidly evolving situation of the Covid-19 pandemic and taking into account observations which have come from Episcopal Conferences, this Congregation now offers an update to the general indications and suggestions already given to Bishops in the preceding decree of 19 March 2020.

Given that the date of Easter cannot be transferred, in the countries which have been struck by the disease and where restrictions around the assembly and movement of people have been imposed, Bishops and priests may celebrate the rites of Holy Week without the presence of the people and in a suitable place, avoiding concelebration and omitting the sign of peace.

The faithful should be informed of the beginning times of the celebrations so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. Means of live (not recorded) telematic broadcasts can be of help. In any event it remains important to dedicate an adequate time to prayer, giving importance above all to the *Liturgia Horarum.*

The Episcopal Conferences and individual dioceses will see to it that resources are provided to support family and personal prayer.

1 - **Palm Sunday.** The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem is to be celebrated within sacred buildings; in Cathedral churches the second form given in the Roman Missal is to be adopted; in parish churches and in other places the third form is to be used.

2 – **The Chrism Mass.** Evaluating the concrete situation in different countries, the Episcopal Conferences will be able to give indications about a possible transfer to another date.

3 – **Holy Thursday.** The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted. At the end of the Mass of the Lord's Supper the procession is also omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. On this day the faculty to celebrate Mass in a suitable place, without the presence of the people, is exceptionally granted to all priests.

4 – **Good Friday.** In the Universal Prayer, Bishops will arrange to have a special intention prepared for those who find themselves in distress, the sick, the dead, (cf. Missale Romanum). The adoration of the Cross by kissing it shall be limited solely to the celebrant.

5 – **The Easter Vigil:** Is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches. For the "Baptismal Liturgy" only the "Renewal of Baptismal Promises" is maintained (cf. Missale Romanum).

Seminaries, houses of clergy, monasteries and religious communities shall follow the indications of this decree.

Expressions of popular piety and processions which enrich the days of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum can be transferred to other suitable days in the year, for example 14 and 15 September, according to the judgement of the Diocesan Bishop.

De mandato Summi Pontificis pro hoc tantum anno 2020.

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 25 March 2020, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

Robert Card. Sarah
Prefect

✠ Arthur Roche
Archbishop Secretary

Pope Francis's words*

Homilies, *Angelus* and *Regina Coeli* and Messages beginning with 9 March 2020

* This volume chronologically gathers the homilies and Angelus messages pronounced on and after 9 March 2020. All these addresses of the Pope can be viewed on the Vaticannews Youtube channel.

Monday, 9 March 2020

Holy Mass[1]

Introduction

In these days, I will offer the Mass for those who are sick as a result of this coronavirus epidemic, for the doctors, the nurses, the volunteers who help so much, the relatives, the elderly in rest homes, detainees who are locked up. Let us pray together, this week, this powerful prayer to the Lord: "Redeem me, O Lord, and have mercy on me. My foot stands on level ground" [Entrance Antiphon, *Ps* 25].

Homily - The grace of shame

The first Reading, from the Prophet Daniel (9, 4-10), is a confession of sins. The people recognise that they have sinned. They acknowledge that the Lord has been faithful with us, but that "we have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly,and have betrayed your commandments and your ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our ancestors, and to all the people of the land" (vv. 5-6). There is a *confession* of sins, a recognition that we have sinned.

And when we prepare to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, we must do what is called an "examina-

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[1] Liturgy of the Word: *Dn* 9:4-10; *Psalm* 78; *Lk* 6:36-38. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/f5FC_a8yN3k

tion of conscience" and see what I have done before God: I have sinned. Recognise the sin. But this acknowledgment of sin cannot merely be an intellectual list of sins, saying "I have sinned", then I will say it to the priest and the priest will forgive me. This is not necessary, it is not the right thing to do. This would be like making a list of the things I need to do, or need to have, or that I have done badly, but which stays in the head. A *true* confession of sins must remain in the heart. To go to confession is not just saying this list to the priest, "I did this, this, this and this …", and then I go away, I am forgiven. No, it is not this. It takes a step, a further step, which is the confession of our miseries, but from the heart; that is, that the list I have made of bad things comes down to the heart.

And this is what Daniel, the Prophet, does. "Justice, Lord, is yours; ours the look of shame" (cf v. 7). When I recognise that I have sinned, that I have not prayed well, and I feel this in my heart, a sense of shame comes to us: "I am ashamed of having done this. I ask your pardon with shame". And shame for our sins is a grace; we must ask for it: "Lord, may I be ashamed". A person who has lost his shame loses his moral judgment, and loses respect for others. He is shameless. The same happens with God: "Shame belongs to us, righteousness belongs to you". Shame belongs to us. "Ours the look of shame we wear today", he. [Daniel] continues, " to our kings, our princes, our ancestors,, because we have sinned against you" (v. 8). "To the Lord our God" first he had said "justice", now he says mercy" (v. 9). When we have not only the recollection, the memory of the sins we have committed, but also the sense of shame, this touches God's heart and He responds with mercy. The journey that leads towards God's

mercy consists of shame for the bad, for the evil things we have done. In this way, when I go to confession, I will say not only the list of sins, but also the feelings of confusion, of shame for having done this to a God so good, so merciful, so just.

Let us ask today for the grace of shame: to be ashamed of our sins. May the Lord grant this grace to all of us.

YOU HAVE BUT ONE MASTER, THE CHRIST

Tuesday, 10 March 2020

Holy Mass[2]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray together for the sick, medical personnel, all those suffering from the epidemic. Let us pray to the Lord also for our priests, so that they may have the courage to go out to the sick, bringing the power of the Word of God and the Eucharist, and accompany medical personnel, volunteers, in the work they are performing.

Homily - Sinners, but in dialogue with God

Yesterday, the Word of God taught us how to recognise our sins and to confess them, but not only with the mind, also with the heart, with a spirit of shame; shame for our sins as a most noble attitude before God. And today the Lord calls all of us sinners to dialogue with Him (cf *Is* 1, 10.16-20). Because sin closes us up in ourselves, it makes us hide, or hide our truth, inside. It is what happened to Adam and Eve: after sinning they hid themselves because they were ashamed; they were naked (cf *Gen* 3, 8-10). And the sinner, when he or she feels shame, is then tempted to hide. And the Lord calls: " 'Come now, let us talk this over, says the Lord' (*Is* 1, 18); let us talk about your sin, let us talk about your situation. Do not be afraid". And He continues: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall

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[2] Liturgy of the Word: *Is* 1:10.16-20; *Psalm* 49; *Mt* 23:1-12. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/JJYLnATN7lw?t=741

be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (v. 18). "Come, because I am able to change everything", the Lord tells us. "Do not be afraid to come and speak. Be courageous even with your misery".

I am reminded of that saint who was so penitent: he prayed so much. And he always tried to give the Lord everything the Lord asked of him. But the Lord was not pleased. And one day he got a little angry with the Lord, because the saint had quite a character. And he said to the Lord, "But, Lord, I don't understand you. I give you everything, everything, and you're always dissatisfied, as if something were missing. What's missing?" "Give me your sins: that's what's missing". Have the courage to go with our misery and speak to the Lord: "Come, come, let's talk about it! Do not be afraid". "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (v. 18).

This is the Lord's invitation. But there is always a deception: instead of going to talk with the Lord, pretending not to be sinners. That is why the Lord rebuked the doctors of the law (cf *Mt* 23:1-12). These people do deeds "for people to see: Wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels,, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi" (vv. 5-6). Appearance, vanity. Covering the truth of our heart with vanity. Vanity never heals! Vanity never heals. Rather, it is poisonous, and continues till it makes the heart ill, leading you to that hardness of heart that says to you: "No, do not go to the Lord, do not go. Remain alone…".

Vanity is precisely the place where we close ourselves off from the Lord's call. Instead, the invitation of the Lord is that of a father, a brother: "Come! Let's talk, let's talk. In the end I can change your life from red to white".

May this Word of the Lord encourage us. May our prayer be a true prayer: about our reality, about our sins, about our misery. He knows, He knows what we are. We know it, but our vanity always invites us to cover it up. May the Lord help us.

TO SERVE AND
TO GIVE HIS LIFE

Wednesday, 11 March 2020

Holy Mass[3]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray for the sick because of this epidemic. And today, in a special way, I would like to pray for prisoners, for our brothers and our sisters who are detained in prisons. They suffer, and we must be near to them with our prayer, so that the Lord might help them, might console them in this difficult moment.

Homily - Vanity distances us from Christ's Cross

The First Reading, a passage from the prophet Jeremiah (18, 18-20), is truly a prophecy of the Passion of the Lord. What do the enemies say? "Come, let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word", "Let's contrive a plot against him". It does not say, "Let's conquer him, let's get rid of him", no. To make his life difficult, to torment him. It is the suffering of the prophet, but there is a prophecy of Jesus. In the Gospel (*Mt* 20, 17-28), Jesus Himself talks to us about this: "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the pagans to be mocked and scourged and crucified" (vv. 18-19). It is not only a death sentence: there is more than that. There is humilia-

[3] Liturgy of the Word: *Jer* 18:18-20; *Psalm* 30; *Mt* 20:17-28. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/lVM5QK4icY0?t=768

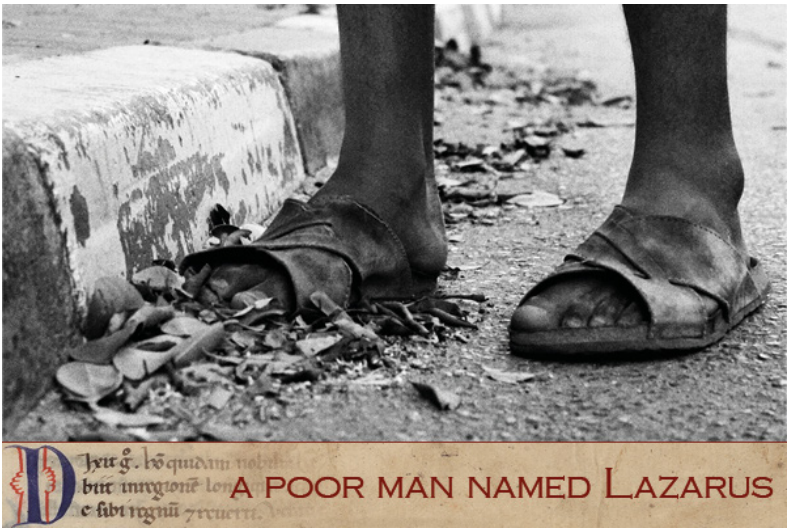
tion, hounding. When there is the dogged persecution of a Christian, of a person, the devil is there. The devil has two styles: seduction, with worldly promises, as he wanted to do with Jesus in the desert, to seduce him, and with seduction to make him change the plan of redemption; and, if this does not work, doggedness. The devil has no half measures. His pride is so great that he tries to destroy. He destroys enjoying the destruction with dogged fury. Let us think of the persecution of so many saints, of so many Christians: their persecutors do not kill them at once, but make them suffer and try to humiliate them in all sorts of ways, to the end. We must not confuse a simple social, political and religious persecution with the dogged fury of the devil. The devil hounds in order to destroy. Let us think of Revelation: he wanted to devour the woman's child who is about to be born (cf 12:4).

The two thieves who were crucified with Jesus were condemned, crucified and left to die in peace. Nobody insulted them: no one was interested. The insult was only for Jesus, against Jesus. Jesus tells the apostles that He will be condemned to death, but He will be "mocked and scourged and crucified"... They mock him.

And the way out of the devil's fury, out of this destruction, is the worldly spirit, what the mother asks for her children, the children of Zebedee (cf *Mt* 20:20-21). Jesus speaks of humiliation, which is His own destiny, and right then and there they ask Him for visibility, for power. Vanity, the worldly spirit, is precisely the way the devil offers to distance onself from Christ's Cross. One's own fulfilment, careerism, worldly success: they are all non-Christian roads, they are all roads for obscuring the Cross of Jesus.

May the Lord give us the grace to know how to discern when the spirit that wants to destroy us with doggedness is present, and when the same spirit wants to console us with the appearances of the world, with vanity. But let us not forget: when there is dogged fury, there is hatred, the vengeance of the defeated devil. This is how it is until today, in the Church. Think of so many Christians, how cruelly persecuted they are. In recent days the newspapers have been talking about Asia Bibi: nine years in prison, suffering. It is the devil's dogged fury.

May the Lord give us the grace to discern the Lord's way, which is the Cross, from the way of the world, which is vanity, appearance, *maquillage*.



A POOR MAN NAMED LAZARUS

Thursday, 12 March 2020

Holy Mass[4]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray together in this moment of pandemic: for the sick, for family members, for parents with children at home... But above all I would like to ask you to pray for those who govern: they must make decisions, and very often decide on measures that people do not like. But it is for our own good. And very often those in authority feel lonely and misunderstood. Let us pray for our government leaders who must make decisions on these measures: may they feel accompanied by the prayer of the people.

Homily - Do not fall prey to indifference

This account of Jesus (cf *Lk* 16:19-31) is very clear; it may even seem like a child's story. It is very simple. Jesus wants to bring to our attention not only a story, but the possibility that all humanity might be living like this. That we too, all of us, might be living this way.

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[4] Liturgy of the Word: *Jer* 17,:5-10; *Psalm* 1; *Lk* 16:19-31. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/1Vl1cCkyRio?t=816

Two men, one satisfied, who knew how to dress well, who perhaps sought out the best fashion designers of the time to dress well. He wore purple and fine linen clothes. And then, he enjoyed himself, throwing lavish banquets himself for every day. He was happy like this. He was not worried. He took some precautions, maybe some cholesterol pills because of the banquets. His life was going along well like this. He was content.

There was a poor man at his door: Lazarus was his name. The rich man knew the poor man was there, he knew it, but it seemed natural to him: "I am getting along well and this man… well, that's life, you make do". At most- the Gospel does not say it – perhaps he at times sent maybe a few crumbs. And so, the life of these two men went on. And both submitted to the law that applies to us all: to die. The rich man died, and Lazarus died. The Gospel says that Lazarus was taken to Heaven, with Abraham, into the bosom of Abraham. Of the rich man, ittells us, "He was buried". Period. And there it ended (cf v. 22).

There are two things that are striking: the fact that the rich man knew that there was this poor man and that he knew his name, Lazarus. But he didn't care, it seemed natural to him. The rich man probably even carried out his business, which in the end was against the poor. He knew very clearly, he was informed of this fact. And the second thing that touches me greatly is the phrase "great abyss" (v. 26), which Abraham says to the rich man. "Between us

and you there is a great abyss: we cannot communicate, we cannot pass from one side to the other" (see v. 26). It is the same abyss that was present in life between the rich man and Lazarus: the abyss did not begin there, the abyss began here.

I have thought about what this man's problem was: the problem of being very, very informed, but with a closed heart. This rich man's information did not reach his heart, he could not be moved by the tragedy of others. He was not even able to call one of the boys who served in the kitchen and say: "Take him this, that, or the other…". The tragedy of information that doesn't penetrate the heart. This happens to us too. We all know, because we have heard it on the television news or seen it in the newspapers: how many children suffer from hunger in the world today; how many children do not have the necessary medicines; how many children cannot go to school. We know of continents affected by this tragedy: we know. "Eh, poor things…". And on we go. This information does not penetrate our heart. And many of us, many groups of men and women live in this detachment between what they think, what they know, and what they feel: the heart is detached from the mind. They are indifferent. Just as the rich man was indifferent to Lazarus's pain. There is the abyss of indifference.

On Lampedusa, when I went for the first time, this word came to mind: the globalisation of indifference. Perhaps we today, here, in Rome, are worried because it ap-

pears that the shops are closed. We have to go and buy this and that, and it seems that we can't go for a walk every day, and it seems that this…". We are worried about *our own* problems. And we forget about starving children, we forget about the poor people who are at the borders of countries, in search of freedom; these forced migrants who flee from hunger and war, and find only a wall, a wall made of iron, a wall of barbed wire, a wall that does not let them pass through. We know that this exists, but the heart does not go there, it does not penetrate. We live in indifference: indifference is the tragedy of being well-informed but not *feeling* the reality of others. This is the chasm: the chasm of indifference.

Then there is another thing that strikes us. Here we know the name of the poor man, we know it: Lazarus. Even the rich man knew it, because when he was in the underworld he asked Abraham to send Lazarus, he recognised him there: "Send Lazarus". (see v. 24). But we do not know the name of the rich man. The Gospel does not tell us what the name of this "Sir" was. He had no name. He had lost his name. He had only the adjectives of his life: rich, powerful... so many adjectives.

This is what selfishness does to us: it makes us lose our real identity, our name, and leads us to evaluate ourselves and others only in terms of adjectives. Worldliness contributes to this. We have fallen into the culture of adjectives, in which your value is what you have, what you can do, but not your name: you have lost your

name. Indifference leads to this. Losing your name. We are only "the rich", we are this, we are that. We are the adjectives.

"We ask the Lord today for the grace of not falling into indifference, the grace that all the information we have about human suffering might penetrate our hearts and move us to do something for others."

THERE WAS A LANDOWNER
WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD...

Friday, 13 March 2020

Holy Mass[5]

Introduction

These days we are united with the sick, the families, who are suffering as a result of this pandemic. I would also like to pray today for pastors who need to accompany the people of God during this crisis. May the Lord grant them the strength and the ability to choose the best ways to help. Drastic measures are not always good. Therefore, we pray that the Holy Spirit might grant pastoral discernment to pastors so that they perceive measures that might not leave the holy, faithful people of God alone, and so that people of God might feel accompanied by their pastors, and by the comfort of the Word of God, the Sacraments and prayer.

Homily - Let us not forget the gratuitousness of revelation

Both of the readings are a prophecy of the Passion of the Lord. Joseph is sold as a slave for twenty silver pieces, and delivered to the Gentiles (cf *Gen* 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28). And Jesus's parable which clearly speaks in symbols of the killing of the Son (cf *Mt* 21,33-43.45). This story tells of a landowner "who planted a vineyard" – the care with which he did so – "he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower" – he did it well. "Then he leased it

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[5] Liturgy of the Word: *Gen* 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28; *Psalm* 104; *Mt* 21:33- 43, 45. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/fjj30U4ezEA?t=783

to tenants and went abroad" (v. 33). This is God's people. The Lord chose those people; there is an election of the people. They are the chosen people. There is also a promise: "Go forth. You are my people" – a promise made to Abraham. And there is also the covenant made with the people at Sinai. The people must always keep that election in their memory – that they are a chosen people; the promise – so they always look ahead in hope; and the covenant in order to live daily in fidelity.

But what happens in this parable is that when the time came to reap the fruits, these people had forgotten that they were not the masters: "The tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another, and stoned a third. Next he sent more servants to them, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way" (vv. 35-36). Jesus clearly shows here – He is speaking to the doctors of the law – how the doctors of the law treated the prophets. "Finally, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let's kill him and take over his inheritance'" (vv. 37-38). They stole the inheritance, which belonged to another. A story of infidelity, of infidelity to their election, of infidelity to the promise, of infidelity to the covenant, which is a gift. The election, the promise and the covenant are a gift from God. Disloyalty to God's gift. Not understanding that it was a gift and taking it as though it were their possession. These people appropriated the gift. They took away the aspect as gift to turn it into their property. And the gift that is wealth, openness, blessing, was closed up, caged in a doctrine of laws, many of them. It was "ideologised". And so the gift lost its nature as a gift, and ended up as

part of an ideology. In particular, as part of a moralistic ideology full of precepts, and indeed ridiculous as it lowers itself to sophisticated arguments for everything. They appropriated the gift.

This is the great sin. It is the sin of forgetting that God made a gift of Himself to us, that God gave us this as a gift. and, forgetting this, becoming owners. And the promise is no longer a promise, the election is no longer election, and the covenant comes to be interpreted according to "my" opinion, becoming an ideology.

Here, in this attitude, I see in the Gospel perhaps the beginning , of clericalism, which is a perversion, which always denies God's gratuitous election, God's gratuitous covenant, God's gratuitous promise. It forgets the gratuitous nature of revelation; it forgets that God manifested Himself as a gift, He made Himself a gift for us and we must give this, make others see this as a gift, not as our possession. Clericalism is not something that belongs only to these times. Rigidity is not something of these days. It already existed at Jesus's time. And then, Jesus goes ahead in explaining the parable – this is chapter 21 – He goes ahead up to chapter 23 with the condemnation, where we see God's wrath against those who take the gift as if it were possession and reduce its richness to the ideological whims of their own mind.

Let us ask the Lord today for the grace to receive the gift as a gift, and of transmitting the gift as a gift, not as a possession, not in a sectarian way, in a rigid way, or in a clericalist way.

HE RAN TO HIS SON,
EMBRACED HIM
AND KISSED HIM

Saturday, 14 March 2020

Holy Mass[6]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray for those who are sick as a result of this pandemic. Today, I would like to ask for a special prayer for families, families who from one day to the next find themselves at home with their children because schools are closed for safety reasons, and have to manage a difficult situation and manage it well, with peace and also with joy. I think especially of families with members with disabilities. Welcome centres for people with disabilities are closed and the people stay with their families. Let us pray for families so that they don't lose peace at this time and that they might succeed to carry the whole family forward with strength and joy.

Homily – Living at home, but not feeling at home

We have often heard this passage from the Gospel (cf *Lk* 15:1-3, 11-32). Jesus tells this parable in a special context: "The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what He had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man,' they

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[6] Liturgy of the Word: *Mct* 7:14-15, 18-20; *Psalm* 102; *Lk* 15:1-3 11-32. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/IeVHQLNkjnA?t=866

said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (vv. 1-2). And Jesus answers them with this parable.

What do they say? The people, the sinners, approach in silence. They do not know what to say, but their presence says many things. They wanted to listen. The doctors of the law, what do they say? They criticise. They "complained", the Gospel says, trying to eradicate the authority Jesus had with the people. This is the great accusation: "He eats with sinners, He is impure".

The parable is in part an explanation of this situation, of this problem. What do they feel? The people feel in need of salvation. The people do not know how to distinguish well, intellectually: "I need to find my Lord, who fills me". They need a guide, a shepherd. And the people approach Jesus because they see in Him a shepherd. They need to be helped to walk in life. They feel this need. The others, the doctors, feel self-sufficient: "We went to university", "I have a doctorate, no, two doctorates. I know very, very well what the law says. Actually, I know every single explanation of the law in detail". And they feel self-sufficient and they despise the people, they despise sinners: disdain for sinners.

In the parable, the same one, what do they say? The son says to the Father: "Give me my share of the estate" (see v. 12). The Father gives, but says nothing, because he is a father. Perhaps he remembered some boyish pranks he did when young, but he says nothing. A father knows how to suffer in silence. A father bides his time. He lets

the bad moments pass. At times the attitude of a father is to "play the fool" in the face of his children's shortcomings. The other son rebukes the father: "You have been unjust".

And what do those in the parable feel? The boy feels the desire to "eat the world", to go beyond, to get out of the house, which perhaps he experiences as a jail. And he also has the front to say to his father, "Give me what is mine". He feels he has courage, power. What does the father feel? The father feels pain, tenderness and great love. Then when the son says those other words: "I will leave this place and go to my father" (v. 18) he finds the father who awaits him, who sees him from afar (cf v. 20). A father who knows how to bide his time for his children. And what does the elder brother feel? The Gospel says: "He became angry" (v. 28), he feels this indignation. And at times being indignant is the only way these people can feel deserving.

These are the things that *are said* in this passage of the Gospel, and the things that *are felt.*

But what is the problem? The problem – let's begin with the elder brother – the problem is that he was at home, but he never understood what it meant to live at home. He did his duties, he did his work, but he did not understand what a relationship of love with his father was. That son "became angry and refused to go in" (v. 28). "But is this not my home?" he thought. The same as the doctors of the law. "There is no order, this sinner has come here and they

throw a party for him. What about me?" The father tells him clearly: "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (v- 31). And this son did not realise this. he lived at home as if it were a hotel, without feeling that fatherliness… Many "guests" in the house of the Church feel that they are the owners! It is interesting: the father does not say a word to the son who returns from sin. He simply kisses him, embraces him and celebrates his return (cf v. 20). Instead, to this [the elder] one he has to explain to enter into his heart. His heart was "blindfolded" by his concepts of fatherhood, sonship, of the way to live.

I remember once a wise elderly priest – a great confessor, a missionary, a man who greatly loved the Church – who spoke of a young priest – very sure of himself, a great believer – who thought he was worth something and that he had rights in the Church. He said: "This is what I pray for: that the Lord might put a banana peel in front of him to make him slip. That would do him good". It was as if he had said – it seems like blasphemy – "It would be good for him to sin because he will need to ask for forgiveness and find the Father".

This parable tells us many things about the Lord. It is the answer to those who criticised Him because He kept the company of sinners. But even today too there are many, people of the Church, who criticise those who approach people in need, humble people, who work, even those who work for us. May the Lord give us the grace to

understand what the problem is. The problem is living at home but not feeling at home, because there is no paternal or fraternal relationship; there is merely the relationship of companions at work.

HE WOULD HAVE GIVEN
YOU LIVING WATER

Sunday, 15 March 2020

III Sunday of Lent (A)

Holy Mass[7]

Introduction

This Lenten Sunday let us all pray together for the sick, for people who suffer. And today I would like to pray with all of you a special prayer for the people who, through their work, guarantee the functioning of society: those working in pharmacies, supermarkets, transport, policemen... We pray for all those who are working so that at this moment social life, the civil life , can keep going ahead.

Homily - Addressing the Lord with our truth

The Gospel (cf *Jn* 4:5-42) tells us about a dialogue, a historical dialogue. – it is not a parable, it happened – of Jesus' encounter with a woman, with a sinner.

It is the first time in the Gospel that Jesus declares His identity. And He declares it to a sinner who had the courage to tell Him the truth: "These men were not my husbands" (cf vv. 16-18). And then with the same argument, she went to proclaim Jesus: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (cf v. 29). She did not go with theological arguments – as she perhaps wanted in the dialogue with Jesus: "On this

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[7] Liturgy of the Word: *Ex* 17:3-7; *Psalm* 94; *Rm* 5:1-2, 5-8; *Jn* 4:5-42. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/-UNgaSJ0EXc?t=777

mountain, on the other mountain…" (cf v. 20). She goes with her truth. And her truth is what sanctifies her, it justifies her. It is her truth that the Lord uses to proclaim the Gospel.

We cannot be Jesus's disciples without our own truth, that which we are. One cannot be disciple of Jesus with arguments alone: "On this mountain, on the other one…". This woman had the courage to dialogue with Jesus – because these two peoples did not dialogue with each other (cf v.9); she had the courage to take interest in Jesus' proposal, in that water, because she knew she was thirsty. She had the courage to confess her weaknesses, her sins. Rather, she had the courage to use her history as a guarantee that He was a prophet. He "told me everything I ever did" (v. 29).

The Lord always wants transparent dialogue, without hiding things, without dual intentions: "I am like this". I can speak with the Lord this way, just as I am, with my own truth. Thus, from my own truth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I find the truth: that the Lord is the Saviour, He Who came to save me and to save us.

This transparent dialogue between Jesus and the woman ends with that confession of the Messianic reality of Jesus, and with the conversion of those people [of Samaria], with that field that the Lord saw was flowering, that came to Him because it was ripe for harvest (cf v. 35).

May the Lord grant us the grace to pray always with the truth, to turn to the Lord with our own truth, not with others' truth, not with truths distilled in debates: "It is true, I had five husbands. This is my truth" (cf vv. 17-18).

Angelus[8]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

At this moment in Milan, the Mass celebrated by the archbishop in the Policlinico for the sick, doctors, nurses and volunteers is coming to an end. The archbishop is close to his people and also close to God in prayer. Last week's photograph comes to mind: him alone on the roof of the Duomo, praying to Our Lady. I would also like to thank all the priests, the creativity of priests. A lot of news arrives to me from Lombardy about this creativity. It is true, Lombardy has been very affected. Priests who think of a thousand ways to be close to the people, so that the people do not feel abandoned; priests with apostolic zeal, who have understood well that in times of pandemic one must not be like "Don Abbondio". Many thanks to you priests.

The Gospel passage for today, the Third Sunday of Lent, presents Jesus' meeting with a Samaritan woman (cf *Jn* 4: 5-42). He is on a journey with His disciples and takes a break in Samaria near a well. The Samaritans were considered heretics by the Jews, and were very much despised, as second-class citizens. Jesus is tired, thirsty. A woman arrives to draw water and He asks her: "Give me a drink" (v. 7). Thus, breaking every barrier, He initiates a dialogue in which He reveals the *mystery of living water* to this woman, that is, of the Holy Spirit, God's gift. In fact, in response to the woman's reaction of surprise, Jesus answers: "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (v. 10).

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[8] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/DomDl9Vgdg0

The focus of this dialogue is water. On the one hand, water as an essential element that slakes the body's thirst and sustains life. On the other, water as a symbol of divine grace which gives eternal life. In the biblical tradition God is the source of living water: as it is said in the Psalms, in the prophets : distancing oneself from God, the source of living water, and from His Law, leads to the worst drought. This is the experience of the people of Israel in the desert. During the long journey to freedom, dying of thirst, they cried out against against Moses and against God because there was no water. So, God willed that Moses made water flow from a rock, as a sign of God's providence accompanying His people and giving them life (cf *Ex* 17:1-7).

The Apostle Paul, too, interprets that rock as a symbol of Christ. He says: "And that rock was Christ" (cf *1 Cor* 10:4). It is the mysterious figure of His presence in the midst of the people of God on their journey. Christ, in fact, is the Temple from which, according to the prophets, flows the Holy Spirit, the living water which purifies and gives life. The one who thirsts for salvation can draw freely from Jesus, and the Spirit will become a spring of life to the full and eternal life in him or in her. The promise of living water that Jesus made to the Samaritan woman becomes a reality in His Passion: from His pierced side "blood and water" flowed (*Jn* 19: 34). Christ, the Lamb, immolated and risen, is the spring from which flows the Holy Spirit Who remits sins and regenerates to new life.

This gift is also the source of testimony. Like the Samaritan woman, whoever personally encounters the living Jesus feels the need to talk about Him to others, so that everyone might arrive at the point of professing that Jesus "is truly the saviour of the world" (*Jn* 4: 42), as the woman's fellow townspeople later said. We too, generat-

ed to new life through Baptism, are called to testify to the life and hope that are within us. If our quest and our thirst are thoroughly slaked in Christ, we will manifest that salvation is not found in the "things" of this world, which in the end produce drought, but in Him Who has loved and always loves us: Jesus, our Saviour.

May Mary, Most Holy, help us cultivate a desire for Christ, font of living water, the only One Who can satisfy the thirst for life and love which we bear in our hearts.

After the Angelus

Saint Peter's Square is closed at this time. Therefore my greetings go directly to you who are connected through the communications media.

In this situation of pandemic, in which we find ourselves living more or less isolated, we are invited to rediscover and deepen the value of communion that unites all the members of the Church. United to Christ we are never alone, but we form one sole Body, of which He is the Head. It is a union that is nourished with prayer, and also with spiritual communion in the Eucharist, a practice that is highly recommended when it is not possible to receive the Sacrament. I say this for everyone, especially for those who live alone.

I renew my nearness to the sick and those caring for them. This goes for all the caregivers and volunteers who help those who cannot leave their homes, and those who are meeting the needs of the poorest and the homeless.

Thank you so much for all the effort that each one of you is making to help at this difficult time. May the Lord bless you, may Our Lady keep you; and please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good Sunday and a good lunch! Thank you.

NO PROPHET IS ACCEPTED
IN HIS OWN NATIVE PLACE

Monday, 16 March 2020

Holy Mass[9]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray for the sick. I am thinking of families, who are cooped up, children who do not go to school, perhaps parents who cannot go out; some will be in quarantine. May the Lord help them to discover new ways, new expressions of love, of living together in this new situation. It is a beautiful opportunity to creatively rediscover true affection in the family. Let us pray for the family, that relationships within the family at this time may always flourish for good.

Homily – God always acts in simplicity

In both texts that today's Liturgy has us meditate on (cf *2 Kings* 5:1-15; *Lk* 4:24-30) there is an attitude that attracts attention, a human attitude, but not a good spirit: indignation. The people of Nazareth began to listen to Jesus, they liked how He spoke, but then someone asked: "Which university did this man study at? This is the son of Mary and Joseph! This man is a carpenter! What could He possibly have to tell us?" And the people are indignant. They enter into this indignation (cf *Lk* 4, 28). This indignation then leads them to violence. And that Jesus, whom they admired at the beginning of the sermon, is cast out, to be thrown down from the mountain (cf v. 29).

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[9] Liturgy of the Word: *2 Kings* 5:1-15; *Psalm* 41-42; *Lk* 4:24-30. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/vXrbQU9DCrY?t=789

Naaman too – this man Naaman, was a good man, open to faith – when the prophet sends a messenger to tell him to bathe seven times in the Jordan he is outraged. But why is that?

"'I was thinking he would be sure to come out to me, and stand there, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure the leprous part. Surely Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, are better than any water in Israel? Could I not bathe in them and become clean?' And he turned round and went off in a rage" (*2 Kings* 5,11-12). With indignation.

There were good people too at Nazareth. But what is there behind these good people that leads them to react indignantly? And in Nazareth, worse: violence. Both the people in the synagogue of Nazareth and Naaman thought that God manifested Himself only in the extraordinary, in things that were out of the ordinary; that God could not act through the commonalities of life, in simplicity. They despised the simple. They became indignant, they despised simple things. And our God makes us understand that He always acts in simplicity: in the simplicity of the house of Nazareth, in the simplicity of everyday work, in the simplicity of prayer... Simple things. Instead, the worldly spirit moves us towards vanity, towards appearances…

Both end in violence. Naaman, who was very educated, slams the door in the prophet's face and takes off – violence, a violent action. The people in the synagogue begin to become agitated, they get angrier and angrier. They make the decision to kill Jesus, however unconsciously, and they drive Him out to throw Him down. Indignation is an ugly temptation that leads to violence.

A few days ago, I was shown a short film, a video, from the door of a building that was in quarantine. There was a person, a young man, who wanted to go out. And the guard told him he couldn't. And he started to punch him indignantly, contemptuously. "And who are you, 'Negro', to stop me from going out?" Indignation is the attitude of the arrogant, but of the arrogant with a nasty poverty of spirit, the arrogant who live only with the illusion of being more than they really are. It is a spiritual "class", those who become indignant. Indeed, very often these people need to become indignant, to feel outraged to feel they are a someone.

This can happen to us too – "the Pharisaic scandal", theologians call it – that is, being scandalised by the simple things of God, the simplicity of the poor, the simplicity of Christians, as if to say: "But this is not God. No, no. Our God is more cultivated, wiser, more important. God cannot act in this simplicity". Outrage always leads to violence; either to physical violence or verbal violence, which kills just like the physical form.

Let us think about these two passages: the indignation of the people in the synagogue of Nazareth and Naaman's outrage, because they did not understand the simplicity of our God.

SEVENTY-SEVEN TIMES

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2020

Holy Mass[10]

Introduction

Today I would like us to pray for the elderly who are suffering in a particular way at this moment: with great inner solitude, many times with a lot of fear. Let us pray to the Lord that He might be near our grandparents and all the elderly, that He might give strength to those who have given us wisdom, life, our story. May we also be near them with our prayer.

Homily – Asking for forgiveness implies forgiving

Jesus has just given a catechesis on the unity of brothers and sisters, and concluded it with beautiful words: "Truly I tell you that if two or three of you agree on earth about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (cf *Mt* 18:19). Unity, friendship, peace between brothers and sisters attracts God's benevolence. And Peter asks the question: "Yes, but what are we to do to the people who offend us?" "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" (v. 21). And Jesus answered with that word which means, in their language, "always": "Seventy times seven" (v. 22). One must always forgive.

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[10] Liturgy of the Word: *Dn* 3:25, 34-43; *Psalm* 24; *Mt* 18:21-35. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/vDmX5LrZ2KE?t=687

It is not easy to forgive because our self-centred hearts are always attached to hatred, to revenge, to resentment.

We have all seen families destroyed by family hatred that is passed down from one generation to the next. Siblings who, in front of a parent's coffin do not greet each other because they are still carrying past resentments. It seems that attachment to hatred is stronger than that of love- This is precisely – let's say – the devil's "treasure" . He always lurks among our grudges, among our hatreds, and makes them grow. He keeps them like that to destroy, to destroy everything. He often destroys over small things.

It is what destroyed this God who came not to condemn but to forgive. This God who is able to throw a feast for a sinner who draws near to Him and forget everything. When God forgives us, He forgets all the evil we've done. Someone has said "it's God's sickness". He doesn't have a memory. He can lose His memory in these cases. God loses his memory regarding the ugly story of so many sinners, of our sins. He forgives us and goes on. He only asks us to do the same: to learn to forgive, not to continue to bear this fruitless cross of hatred, of resentment, of "You're going to pay for this".

This teaching is neither Christian nor human. Jesus' generosity teaches us that to enter into heaven, we must forgive. Moreover, He says: "You, do you go to Mass?" "Yes." " 'But if when you go to Mass, you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, be reconciled first' (cf *Mt* 5:23-4). Do not come to me with love for me in one hand and hatred for your brother or sister in the other". Consistency in love. Forgiving. Forgiving from the heart.

There are people who live by condemning people, speaking ill of people, continually harming their co-workers' reputations, and that of their neighbours, their relatives… Because they do not pardon something that was done to them, or they do not forgive something that they did not like. It seems that the wealth of the devil is this: sowing the love of non-forgiveness, living attached to non-forgiveness. Indeed, forgiveness is a condition for going to heaven.

The parable that Jesus tells us (cf *Mt* 18:23-25) is very clear: forgive. May the Lord teach us this wisdom of forgiving, which is not easy. And let us do something: when we go to receive the the Sacrament of Reconciliation, let us first ask ourselves: "Do I forgive?". If I feel that I do not forgive, I cannot make believe that I am asking forgiveness because I will not be forgiven. Asking forgiveness means forgiving. Both go together. They cannot be separated. Moreover, those who ask for forgiveness for themselves, like that man whose master forgives everything, but do not forgive others, end up like that man (cf vv. 32-34). "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart" (v. 35).

May the Lord help us understand this, to lower our heads so as not to be proud but magnanimous in forgiving. At least to forgive "out of interest". Why? Yes, to forgive, because if I do not forgive, I will not be forgiven. At least this. But always forgiveness.

NOT THE SMALLEST LETTER

Wednesday, 18 March 2020

Holy Mass[11]

Introduction

Today let us pray for the deceased, for those who have died because of the virus. In particular, I would like us to pray for the medical personnel who have died in these days. They have given their lives in service to the sick.

Homily – Our God is close and asks us to be close to each other

The theme of both of today's readings is the law (cf *Dt* 4:1,5-9; *Mt* 5:17-19): the law that God gives to His people, the Law that the Lord wanted to give to us and that Jesus wished to bring to its ultimate perfection. But there is something that attracts attention: the *way* in which God gives the law. Moses says: "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?" (*Dt* 4:7). The Lord gives the law to His people with an attitude of *closeness*. They are not the prescriptions of a governor, who may be far-off, or of a dictator… No. There is closeness. And we know through revelation that there is a paternal nearness of a father accompanying His people, giving them the gift of the law. A God who is near. Indeed, "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?"

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[11] Liturgy of the Word: *Dt* 4:1, 5-9; *Psalm* 147; *Mt* 5:17-19. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/jywCo5exOCw?t=492

Our God is the God of closeness. He is a God who is near, who walks with His people. That image of the desert, in Exodus: the cloud and the column of fire to protect the people. He walks with His people. He is not a God who leaves the prescriptions of the law in writing and then goes His own way. He writes the prescriptions with His own hand on the rock. Then He gives them, hands them over to Moses. He doesn't give them and then go on His own way. He walks, He is close. "What great nation is there that has its gods so near?" It is closeness. Our God is a God of closeness.

And the first response of man, in the first pages of the Bible, consists of two attitudes of non-closeness. Our response is always to distance ourselves. We distance ourselves from God. He comes close to us and we pull away. Those first two pages. The first reaction of Adam with his wife is to hide. They hide themselves from God's closeness. They are ashamed, because they have sinned. Sin leads us to hide ourselves, to not want nearness. (cf *Gn* 3:8-10). So many times we adopt a theology thinking of a God who is a judge. And so I hide myself, I am afraid. The second human reaction before this proposal of God's closeness, is to kill. To kill one's brother. "I am not my brother's keeper" (cf *Gn* 4:9).

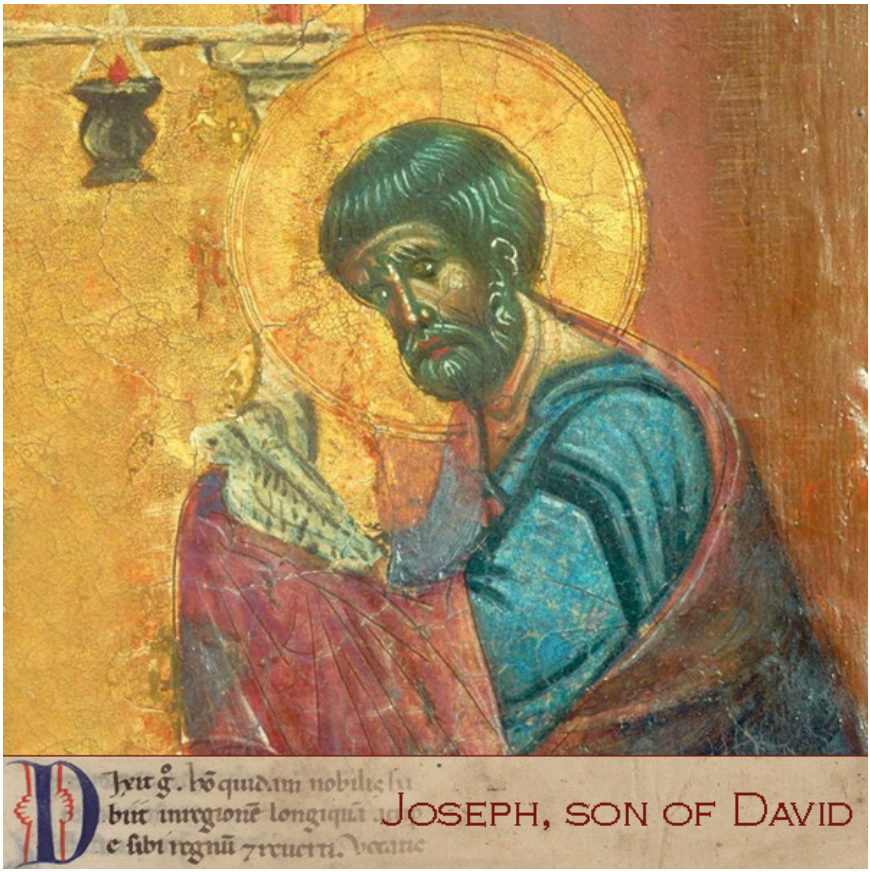
Two types of reaction that inhibit every type of nearness. Man rejects God's nearness. He wants to be in control of relationships. And relationships always bring with them some type of vulnerability. God draws near making Himself weak. And the closer He comes, the weaker He seems to be. When He comes to live among us, He makes Himself man, one of us. He makes Himself weak. He bears that weakness even unto death, the most cruel death, the

death at the hands of murderers, the death of the worst sinners. God humbles Himself when He draws near. He humbles Himself to be with us, to walk with us, to help us.

The "God who is near" speaks to us of humility. He is not a "great God", no. He is nearby. He is at home. We see this in Jesus, God made man, close to us even unto death. His disciples accompany Him, He teaches them, He lovingly corrects them … Let us think, for example, of Jesus' closeness to the anguished disciples of Emmaus: they were anguished, defeated, and He drew close to them slowly, to allow them to understand the message of life, of the resurrection (cf *Lk* 24:13-32).

Our God is close and asks us to be close to each other, not to distance ourselves from one another. *In this moment of crisis because of the pandemic we are experiencing, this nearness begs to be manifested more* , to be seen more. *Perhaps we cannot draw near physically to others because of the fear of contagion, but we can reawaken in ourselves a habit of drawing near to others through prayer, through help. There are many ways of drawing near.* And why must be close to each other? Because our God is near. He wished to accompany us in life. He is the God of closeness. For this reason we are not persons in isolation. We are near to each other, because the inheritance we have received from the Lord is closeness, that is, the gesture of closeness.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace of being near to each other; *not to hide ourselves from each other*, not to wash our hands of others' problems as Cain did, no. Closeness. Proximity. Nearness. Indeed, "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?" (*Dt* 4:7)



Joseph, son of David

Thursday, 19 March 2020

Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Holy Mass[12]

Introduction

Today let us pray for our brothers and sisters who are in prison. They suffer a lot because of the uncertainty of what is happening inside the prison, They are also thinking of their families and how they are doing, some of them are sick, wondering if they need anything... Let us be near those in prison today. They are suffering a lot during this uncertain and painful moment.

Homily - Living in the tangibility of daily life and of mystery

The Gospel (*Mt* 1:16, 18-21,24) tells us that Joseph was a "just man", that is, a man of faith, who lived the faith. A man who could be included in the list of all those people of faith we remembered today in the Office of Readings (cf *Hb* 11); those people who lived faith as the "foundation of what one hopes, as a guarantee of what cannot be seen, and the proof that cannot be seen". Joseph was a man of faith: for this reason he was "just". Not only because he believed but also because he lived this faith. He was a "just" man. He was chosen to educate a man who was true man, but who was also God. Only God could have

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[12] Liturgy of the Word: *2 Sam* 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; *Psalm* 88; *Rm* 4:13, 16-18.22; *Mt* 1:16, 18-21, 24. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/PUx-lZfjXZY8?t=845

educated such a person, but there wasn't someone like that. The Lord chose a just man, a man of faith, a man who was capable of being a man, and also capable of speaking with God, of entering into God's mystery. This was Joseph's life: living his profession, his life as a man and entering into the mystery. A man capable of dialoguing with mystery, of interacting with the mystery of God. He was not a dreamer. He entered into the mystery with the same naturalness with which he pursued his craft, with the precision of his craft. He was able to adjust a wooden angle within a millimetre, he knew how to do it. He was able to sand down, to reduce a wooden surface by a millimetre. He was precise, but also able to enter into the mystery that he could not control.

This was the Joseph's holiness: justly and professionally pursuing his life, his , and at the right moment, entering into the mystery. When the Gospel talks about Joseph's dreams, it enables us to understand this: he enters into the mystery.

I think of the Church, today, on this Solemnity of Saint Joseph. The members of the faithful, our bishops, our priests, our consecrated men and women, popes: Are they capable of entering into the mystery, or do they need to be in control through rules and regulations which defend them against what they cannot control? When the Church loses the possibility of entering into the mystery, she loses the ability to adore. The prayer of adoration happens only when one enters into God's mystery. Let us ask the Lord for the grace that the Church may live in the concreteness of everyday life and also in that "concreteness" of the mystery. If she cannot do so, she will be just half a Church, a pious association, going ahead by prescriptions

but without a sense of adoration. Entering into the mystery is not about dreaming. Entering into the mystery is precisely this: to adore. Entering into the mystery is doing today what we will do in the future. When we will have arrived in God's presence: adore.

May the Lord grant His Church this grace.

Prayer for Spiritual Communion

I invite all those who are far away and follow the Mass by television to make a spiritual communion.

At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers You. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You. Amen.

VIDEO MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO MARK THE MOMENT OF PRAYER PROMOTED FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY BY THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (CEI), ON THE FEAST OF SAINT JOSEPH[13]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I join in this moment of prayer that the Episcopal Conference [of Italy] is promoting, as a sign of unity for the whole country.

In this unprecedented situation, in which everything seems to be uncertain, let us help each other to remain steadfast to what really matters. This is the advice I have received in so many letters from your Pastors who, in sharing such a dramatic moment, seek to sustain your hope and your faith with their word.

The Rosary is the prayer of the humble and of the saints. In its mysteries, they contemplate, along with Mary, the life of Jesus, the merciful face of the Father. O, how much we all need to be truly comforted, to feel the embraced by his loving presence!

The truth of this experience is measured in our relationship with others, who at this moment, are our closest relatives. Let us be close to one another, being charitable, understanding, patient and forgiving.

Though you may be confined to your own homes, allow your hearts to expand so that it may be available and welcoming to all.

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[13] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/tqmS3tPT14M

This evening we are praying together, entrusting ourselves to the intercession of St Joseph, Guardian of the Holy Family, Guardian of all our families. The carpenter of Nazareth too, experienced precariousness and bitterness. Though he worried about the future, he knew how to walk the darkness of certain moments, always letting himself be guided by God's will without reservation.

Protect, O Holy Guardian, this our nation.

Enlighten those responsible for the common good, so that they might know — like you do — how to care for those entrusted to their responsibility.

Grant intelligence of knowledge to those seeking adequate means for the health and physical well-being of their brothers and sisters.

Sustain those who are spending themselves for those in need, even at the cost of their own safety: volunteers, nurses, doctors who are on the front lines in curing the sick.

Bless, St Joseph, the Church: beginning with her ministers, make her the sign and instrument of your light and your goodness.

Accompany, O St Joseph, our families: with your prayerful silence, create harmony between parents and their children, in a special way with the youngest.

Preserve the elderly from loneliness: grant that no one might be left in desperation from abandonment and discouragement.

Comfort those who are the most frail, *encourage* those who falter, *intercede* for the poor.

With the Virgin Mother, beg the Lord to liberate the world from every form of pandemic.

Amen.

YOU SHALL LOVE
THE LORD YOUR GOD

Friday, 20 March 2020

Holy Mass[14]

Introduction

Yesterday, I received a message from a priest from Bergamo, who asks that we pray for the doctors of Bergamo, Treviglio, Brescia, Cremona, who are working at the end of their strength; they are giving their lives to help those who are ill, to save others' lives. And let us pray also for those in positions of responsibility. It is not easy for them to manage this moment and very often they suffer from being misunderstood. Whether they are doctors, hospital staff, health care volunteers or civil authorities. Right now they are pillars helping us to move forward and defend us in this crisis. Let us pray for them.

Homily – Return to God and return to the embrace of the Father

When I read or listen to this passage from the prophet Hosea, which we heard in the First Reading (cf 14:2-10), which says "Return Israel, to the Lord, your God" (v. 2), "return"… When I hear it, I remember a song that Carlo Buti sang 75 years ago. The Italian families in Buenos Aires used to listen to it. They liked it a lot. "Return to your daddy. He will still sing you a lullaby". "Return." It is your daddy who tells you to return. God is your Daddy, not a judge. He is your Daddy. "Come home, listen,

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[14] Liturgy of the Word: *Hos* 14:2-10; *Psalm* 80; *Mk* 12:28-34. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/F2X7QzEkCLg?t=852

come". And that memory – I was still just a boy – leads me straight away to the father in Chapter 15 of Luke, that that father who, it says, "while he was still a long way off, … saw him" (cf v. 20), that son who had gone away with all his money and squandered it (vv. 13-14). If he sees him from a distance, it's because He was waiting for him. How many times He went up the terrace day after day, month after month, perhaps years even. He waited for His son. He saw him from afar (cf v. 20). Return to your Daddy, return to your Father. He is waiting for you. It is God's tenderness that speaks to us, especially during Lent. It is the time to enter into ourselves and to remember the Father, to return to our Daddy.

"No, father, I am ashamed to return because… You know, father, I have done many things, I have done so many things wrong…". What does the Lord say? "Return, I heal their disloyalty, I will love them with all my heart, for my anger has turned from them. I will fall like dew on Israel. He shall bloom like the lily, and thrust out roots like the poplar" (cf *Hos* 14: 5-6). Return to your father who awaits you. The God of tenderness will heal us. He will heal us so many of life's wounds, of the many bad things we have done. Everyone has their own!

Let us think of this: Going back to God is going back to an embrace, the Father's embrace. And let us think of that other promise that Isaiah makes: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (cf 1: 18). He is capable of transforming us, He is capable of changing our hearts, but we must make the first step: to return. It is not going to God, no. It is going back home.

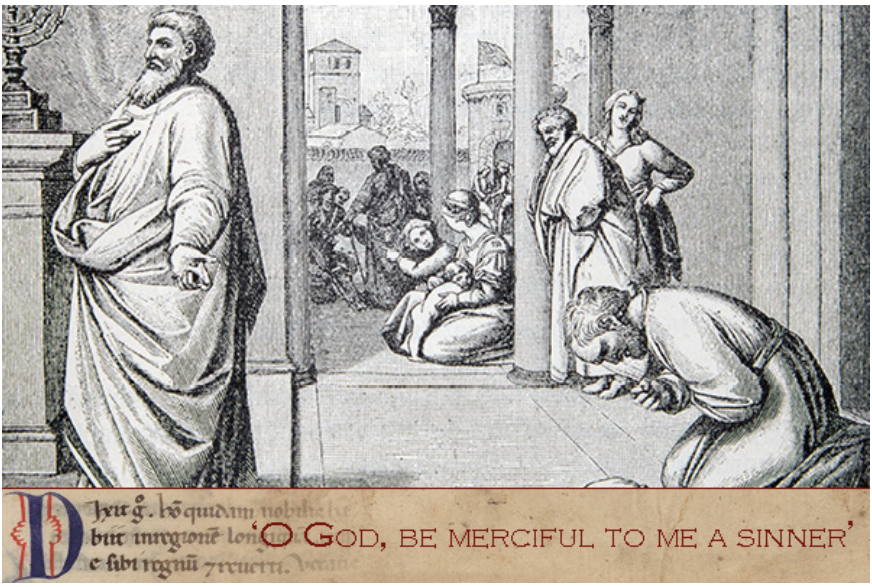
And Lent always focuses on this conversion of the heart that, in the Christian way of life, takes form in the

sacrament of Confession. It is the moment to… I don't know whether to say "settle accounts", I don't like that – to let God "whiten" us, to let God "purify" us, to let God embrace us.

I know that many of you go to confession before Easter so you can be right with God again. But many will say to me today: "But, Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, when I can't leave the house? And I want to make peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me. I want my Daddy to embrace me… How can I do it if I can't find a priest?" Do what the Catechism says.

It is very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He is your Father. Tell Him the truth: 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an Act of Contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession, but forgive me now.' You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near to God's forgiveness, as the Catechism teaches us, without having a priest at hand. Think about it: this is the moment! This is the right moment, the appropriate moment. An Act of Contrition, made well. In this way our souls will become as white as snow.

It would be good if today this "Return" could echo in our ears, this "Return to your Daddy, return to your Father". He is waiting for you and will throw a feast for you.



'O God, be merciful to me a sinner'

Saturday, 21 March 2020

Holy Mass[15]

Introduction

Today I would like to remember the families who cannot leave their homes. Perhaps the only horizon they have is the balcony. And inside, the family, with the children, teenagers, parents… May they find the way to communicate well with each other, to build loving relationships in the family, and may they succeed in vanquishing the anguish of this time, together, as a family. Let us pray for the peace of families today, in this crisis, and for creativity.

Homily – With a "naked heart"

The Word of the Lord that we heard yesterday: "Return, come home" (cf *Hos* 14,2); in the same book of the prophet Hosea we also find the answer: "Come, let us return to the Lord" (*Hos* 6,1). It is the answer when that "return home" touches the heart: "Let us return to the Lord: He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us. He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds … Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear" (*Hos* 6,1.3). The trust in the Lord is sure: "He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth" (v. 3). And with this hope, the people commence their journey to rediscover the Lord. And one of the ways, one of the methods for finding the Lord is prayer. Let us pray to the Lord, let us return to Him.

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[15] Liturgy of the Word: *Hos* 6,1-6; *Psalm* 50; *Lk* 18,9-14. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/K_giBLSr7HU?t=655

In the Gospel (cf *Lk* 18,9.14), Jesus teaches us *how to pray*. There are two men, a presumptuous one who goes to pray, but in order to say that he is good, like saying to God: "Look at me, I am so good: if you need anything, tell me, and I will solve your problem". He addresses God in this way. Presumptuously. Perhaps he did all the things that the Law said, he says: "I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (v. 12) … "I am good". This reminds us also of the other two men. It reminds us of the older son in the parable of the prodigal son, when he says to the father : "I have been so good but you never throw a party for me, but he is a wretch and you celebrate for him…" Presumptuous (see *Lk* 15: 29-30). The other, whose story we have heard in these days, is that rich man, the man without a name, but who was rich; incapable of making a name for himself but rich, and the misery of others did not matter to him (see *Lk* 16: 19-21). These are the ones who are sure of themselves or of their money or their power.

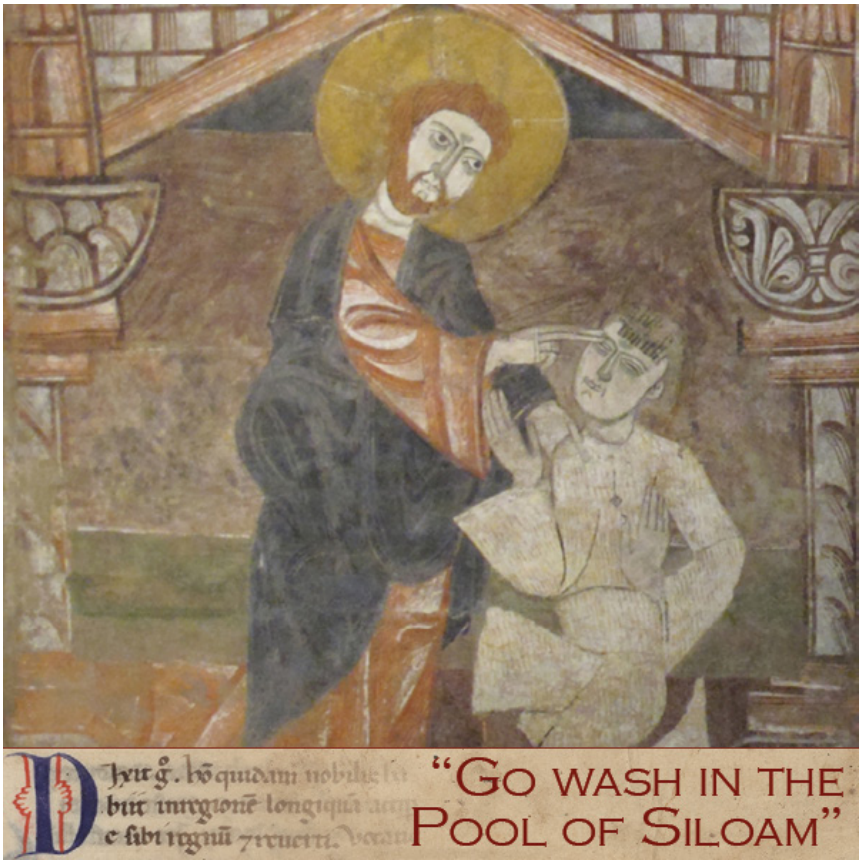
Then there is the other, the publican. He does not go to the altar but stays at a distance. "The tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God be merciful to me a sinner'" (*Lk* 18: 13). This also leads us to the memory of the prodigal son: he is aware of the sins he has committed, of the bad things he has done; he too beat his breast: "I shall … go to my father and I shall say to him, 'Father, I have sinned'". Humiliation (*Lk* 15: 17-19). It reminds us of the other, the beggar Lazarus, at the door of the rich man, who lived out his misery in front of the presumptuousness of that lord (cf *Lk* 16: 20-21). There is always this combination of people in the Gospel.

In this case, the Lord teaches us how to pray, how to approach, how we must approach the Lord: with humility. There is a beautiful image in the liturgical hymn of

the feast of Saint John the Baptist. It says that the people came to the Jordan to receive baptism, "naked in soul and foot": to pray with the naked soul, unembellished, without dressing up in one's own virtues. He, we read at the beginning of the Mass, forgives all sins but needs us to show Him our sins, with our nakedness. To pray in this way, exposed, with a naked soul, without covering up, without trusting even in what I have learned about the way to pray… To pray, you and I, face to face, with a naked soul. This is what the Lord teaches us. Instead, when we go to the Lord, a bit too sure of ourselves, we fall into the presumptuousness of this man [the Pharisee], or of the elder son, or of that rich man who lacked nothing. We will have the same sureness from the other side. "I will go to the Lord … I want to go, to be educated … and I will speak to Him face to face, practically…". This is not the way. The way is by lowering oneself. Lowering oneself. The way is reality. And the only man who, in this parable, had understood reality, was the tax collector : "You are God and I am a sinner". This is reality. But I say that I am a sinner not with the mouth: with the heart. To feel that one is a sinner.

Let us not forget this, which the Lord teaches us: justifying oneself is arrogance, it is pride, it is exalting oneself. It is dressing oneself up as something that one is not. And the miseries remain within. The Pharisee justified himself. [Instead he needed to] Confess directly his own sins, without justifying them, without saying: "But no, I did this but it was not my fault…". The naked soul. The naked soul.

May the Lord teach us to understand this, this attitude to begin to pray. When we begin prayer with our justifications, with our certainties, it will not be a prayer: it will be speaking to the mirror. Instead, when we begin prayer with true reality – "I am a sinner" – it is a good step towards letting the Lord look upon us. May Jesus teach us this.



"Go wash in the Pool of Siloam"

Sunday, 22 March 2020

IV Sunday of Lent (A)

Holy Mass[16]

Introduction

In these days, we hear the news of many deaths: men and women who die alone, without being able to say goodbye to their loved ones. Let us think of them and pray for them. But also for their families, who cannot accompany their loved ones in their passing. Our special prayer is for the deceased and their relatives.

Homily - What happens when Jesus passes

This passage from the Gospel of John (see 9: 1-41) speaks for itself. It is a proclamation of Jesus Christ and also a catechesis. I would like only to highlight one thing. There is a phrase of Saint Augustine that has always struck me: "I fear Christ when He passes" – "*Timeo Dominum Transeuntem*". "I am afraid that Jesus will pass". "But why are you afraid of the Lord? – "I am afraid of not being aware that it is Christ, and letting Him pass by". One thing is clear: In Jesus' presence, the heart's true sentiments flourish, true attitudes emerge. It is a grace and so Augus-

[16] Liturgy of the Word: *1Sam* 16: 1.4.6-7.10-13; *Psalm* 22; *Eph* 5: 8-14; *Jn* 9: 1-41. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/kNHfAgejMzY?t=1148

tine was afraid he might let Him pass by without realising He was passing.

It is clear here: He heals a blind man and a scandal ensues. Then, the best and the worst of people comes out. The blind man, the wisdom of the blind man, the way he responds is surprising. He was used to moving with his hands, he could sense danger, he could sense dangerous things that might make him slip. And he moves like a blind man. He uses clear, precise argumentation, and then he even uses irony, he permits himself this luxury.

The doctors of the Law knew all the laws, all of them, all of them. But they were fixed there. They did not understand when God was passing by. They were rigid, attached to their habits. Jesus Himself says so, in the Gospel: attached to habits. And if in order to conserve these habits, they had to commit an injustice, it wasn't a problem, because the habits said that was not justice; and that rigidity led them to commit injustices. That narrow-mindedness came out in front of Christ.

Only this. I advise you all to take the Gospel today, chapter 9 of the Gospel of John, and to read it, at home, calmly. Once, twice, to understand well what happens when Jesus passes: that the sentiments come out. To understand well what Augustine tells us: I am afraid of the Lord when He passes, that I will not realise and I will not recognise Him. And I will not convert. Do not forget: read chapter 9 of *John* once, twice, three times, taking all the time you like.

Prayer for spiritual communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there, and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.

Angelus[17]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

At the centre of the liturgy of this fourth Sunday of Lent there is the theme of *light*. The Gospel (cf *Jn* 9: 1-41) recounts the episode of the man blind from birth, to whom Jesus gives sight. This miraculous sign confirms Jesus' affirmation that "I am the light of the world" (v. 5), the light that brightens our darkness. Jesus is thus. He operates illumination on two levels: a physical level and a spiritual level: the blind person first receives the *sight* of the eyes and then is led to *faith* in the "Son of Man" (v. 35), that is, in Jesus. It is all a journey. Today it would be good if you were all to take a copy of the Gospel according to John, chapter nine, and read this passage: it is so good and it will do us good to read it once or twice more. The wonders that Jesus performs are not spectacular gestures, but have the purpose of leading to faith through a journey of inner transformation.

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[17] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/dzdbP8dOvx4

The doctors of the law – who were there, a group – persist in not admitting the miracle, and ask the healed man insidious questions. But he disconcerts them with the power of reality: "One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see" (v. 25). Amidst the distrust and hostility of those who surround him and interrogate him, incredulous, he gradually takes a route that leads him to discover the identity of the One who opened his eyes and to confess his faith in Him. At first he considers Him a prophet (cf v. 17); then he recognises Him as one Who comes from God (cf v. 33); finally he welcomes Him as the Messiah and prostrates himself before Him (cf vv. 36-38). He understood that by giving him sight Jesus displayed "the works of God" (cf v. 3).

May we too have this experience! With the light of faith he who was blind discovers his new identity. He is now a "new creature", able to see his life and the world around him in a new light, because he has entered into communion with Christ, he has entered into another dimension. He is no longer a beggar marginalised by the community; he is no longer a slave to blindness and prejudice. His path of enlightenment is a metaphor for the path of liberation from sin to which we are called. Sin is like a dark veil that covers our face and prevents us from clearly seeing ourselves and the world; the Lord's forgiveness takes away this blanket of shadow and darkness and gives us new light. The Lenten period that we are living is an opportune and valuable time to approach the Lord, asking for His mercy, in the different forms that Mother Church proposes to us.

The healed blind man, who now sees both with the eyes of the body and with those of the soul, is the image of every baptised person, who immersed in Grace has been pulled out of the darkness and placed in the light of faith. But it is not enough to *receive* the light, one must *become light*. Each one of us is called to receive the divine light in order to manifest it with our whole life. The first Christians, the theologians of the first centuries, used to say that the community of Christians, that is the Church, is the "mystery of the moon", because it gave light but it was not its own light, it was the light it received from Christ. We too can be "mystery of the moon": giving light received from the sun, which is Christ, the Lord. Saint Paul reminds us of this today: "Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth" (*Eph* 5: 8-9). The seed of new life placed in us in Baptism is like the spark of a fire, which first of all purifies us, burning the evil in our hearts, and allows us to shine and illuminate. With the light of Jesus.

May Mary Most Holy help us to imitate the blind man of the Gospel, so that we can be flooded with the light of Christ and set out with Him on the way of salvation.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

In these trying days, while humanity trembles due to the threat of the pandemic, I would like to propose to all Christians that together we lift our voices towards Heaven. I invite all the Heads of the Churches and the leaders of every Christian community, together with all Christian of the various confessions, to invoke the Almighty, the

omnipotent God, to recite at the same time the prayer that Jesus, our Lord, taught us. I, therefore, invite everyone to do this several times a day, but all together, to *recite the Our Father this coming Wednesday, 25 March, at noon*, all together. On that day on which many Christians recall the annunciation to the Virgin Mary of the Incarnation of the Word, may the Lord listen to the united prayer of all of His disciples who are preparing themselves to celebrate the victory of the Risen Christ.

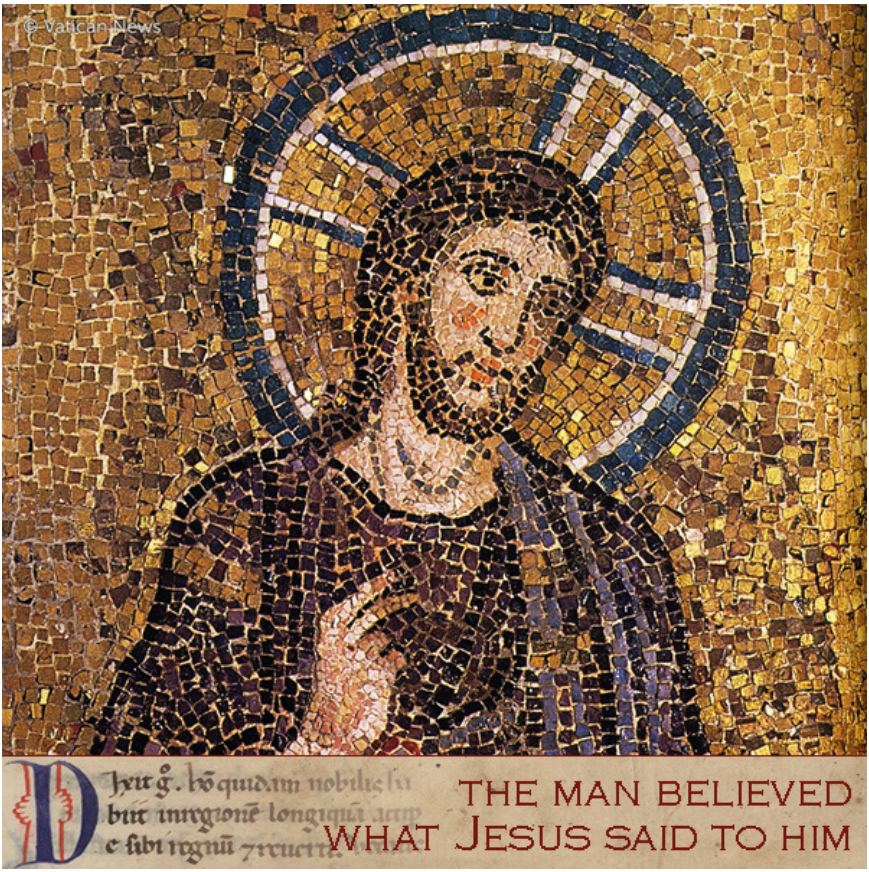
With this same intention, this coming Friday, 27 March, at 6:00pm, I will preside over a moment of prayer on the *sagrata* of Saint Peter's Basilica, before the empty square. I invite everyone to participate spiritually through the means of communication. We will listen to the Word of God, we will lift up our supplication, we will adore the Blessed Sacrament, with which at the end, I will give the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, to which will be connected the possibility of receiving the plenary indulgence.

To the pandemic caused by the virus, we want to respond with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness. Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt toward those persons who are the most lonely and tried. Our closeness to the doctors, the healthcare workers, nurses, volunteers… Our closeness to the authorities who must impose stringent measures, but for our own good. Our closeness to the police, to the soldiers who try always to keep order on the streets, to ensure that the things the government asks to be done for the good of all are implemented. Closeness to all.

I express my closeness to the populations of Croatia, struck this morning by an earthquake. May the Lord give them the strength and solidarity to face this calamity.

And do not forget: today, take the Gospel and read calmly, slowly, the ninth chapter of John. I will do it too. It will do us all good.

And to all I wish a blessed Sunday. Do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your meal and *arrivederci*.



THE MAN BELIEVED WHAT JESUS SAID TO HIM

Monday, 23 March 2020

Holy Mass[18]

Introduction

Let us pray today for the people who, due to the pandemic, are starting to have economic problems, as they cannot work and all this has an effect on the family. Let us pray for people who have this problem.

Homily – We must pray with faith, perseverance and courage

This father asks for health for his son (see *Jn* 4: 43-54). The Lord rebukes everyone a little, but also him: "Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe" (see v. 48). The official, instead of remaining silent, goes forward and says to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies" (v. 49). And Jesus answers, "Go, your son will live" (v. 50).

It takes three things to make a true prayer. The first is *faith*: "If you have no faith…" And very often, prayer is merely oral, made using the mouth, but it does not come from the faith of the heart; or it is a weak faith… Let us think of another father, that of the possessed son, when Jesus answers: "Everything is possible for one who has faith"; how the father says clearly: "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (see *Mk* 9: 23-24). Faith in prayer. Praying with faith, both when we pray outside [in a place of worship],

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[18] Liturgy of the Word: Is 65: 17-21; Psalm 29; Jn 4: 43-54. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/FIdz7tE2T8k?t=794

and when we come here, and the Lord is there: do I have faith or is it a habit? Let us be attentive in prayer: let us not fall into habit without the awareness that the Lord is there, that I am speaking with the Lord and that He is capable of solving the problem. The first condition for a true prayer is faith.

The second condition that Jesus teaches us is *perseverance*. Some ask, but grace does not come: they do not have this perseverance, because in the end they do not need it, or they do not have faith. And Jesus Himself teaches us the parable of that man who goes to his neighbour at midnight to ask for bread: the perseverance of knocking on the door (see *Lk* 11: 5-8). Or the widow, with the dishonest judge: she insists and insists and insists: it is perseverance (see *Lk* 18: 1-8). Faith and perseverance go together, because if you have faith, it is sure that the Lord will grant you what you ask. And if the Lord makes you wait, knock, knock, knock: at the end the Lord will give you the grace. But He does not do this, the Lord, to make Himself sought after, or because He says it's "better to wait", no. He does it for our own good, so that we take it seriously. Take prayer seriously, not like parrots: *blah blah blah* and nothing more. Jesus Himself rebukes us: "Do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words" (see *Mt* 6: 7-8). No, is perseverance, there. It is faith.

And the third thing that God wants in prayer is *courage.* Someone might think: it takes courage to pray and to stay before the Lord? It does. The courage to sty there asking and going ahead, rather, almost – almost, I don't want to say something heretical – but almost like threatening the Lord. The courage of Moses before God, when God

wanted to destroy his people and put him at the head of another people. He says: "No. I will stay with the people" (see *Ex* 32: 7-14). Courage, the courage of Abraham, when he negotiates Sodom's salvation: "And if there were thirty, and if there were twenty-five, and if there were twenty…": There was courage there (see *Gen* 18: 22-33). This virtue of courage is so necessary. Not only for apostolic action but also for prayer.

Faith, perseverance and courage. In these days, in which it is necessary to pray, to pray more, let us think about whether we pray in this way: with faith that the Lord can intervene, with perseverance and courage. The Lord does not let us down, He does not disappoint. He makes us wait, He takes His time, but He does not disappoint. Faith, perseverance and courage.

Prayer for spiritual communion

Those who cannot receive communion, can now make spiritual communion:

At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers You. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You. Amen.

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TOOK UP HIS MAT,
AND WALKED

Tuesday, 24 March 2020

Holy Mass[19]

Introduction

I have received the news of the passing in these days several doctors, priests and, I don't know, some nurses, who were infected, who caught this disease because they were in the service of the sick. Let us pray for them, for their families, and I thank God for the example of heroism who give themselves in healing the sick.

Homily – The disease of sloth and the water that regenerates us

Today's liturgy makes us reflect on water, water as a symbol of salvation, because it is a means of salvation, but water is also a means of destruction: think of the flood… But in these readings, water is for salvation.

In the first Reading (see *Ez* 47: 1-9. 12), that water that leads to life, that heals the waters of the sea, a new water that heals. And in the Gospel (see *Jn* 5: 1-16), the pool, that pool where the sick went, full of water, to heal themselves, because it was said that every now and then the waters moved, as if it were a river, because an angel descended from heaven to move them, and the first who threw themselves into the waters were healed. And so many sick

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[19] Liturgy of the Word: *Ez* 47: 1-9.12; *Psalm* 45; *Jn* 5: 1-16. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/kh_cpYz_jOc?t=941

people lay there: "In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame and crippled" (v. 3), waiting to be healed, waiting for the water to move.

There was a man there who had been ill for thirty-eight years – thirty-eight years there, waiting to be healed. This makes us think, doesn't it? It's a bit too long… because someone who wants to be healed arranges to have someone who helps him, he moves, he is quick, smart… But this man, thirty-eight years there, to the point that one doesn't know if he is ill or dead… "When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, He said to him, 'Do you want to be well?'". And the answer is interesting: he does not say yes, he complains. Of the illness? No. The sick man answers: "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me" (v. 7). Jesus says to him: "Rise, take up your mat, and walk" (v. 8). "Immediately the man became well" (v. 9).

That man's attitude makes us think. Was he sick? Yes, perhaps he had some form of paralysis, but it seems he could walk a little. But he was sick to the heart, he was sick in his soul, he was sick with pessimism, he was sick with sadness, he was sick with apathy. This is the disease the man had: "Yes, I want to live, but…", he was there. And his answer is not, "Yes, I want to be healed!" No, it was to complain: "The others arrive first, always the others". His answer to Jesus' offer to heal him is a complaint about others. And in this way, he spent thirty-eight years

complaining about others. And he did nothing to heal himself.

It was a sabbath: we have heard what the doctors of the Law did (vv. 10-13). But the key is the encounter with Jesus, afterwards: "Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, 'Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you'" (v. 14). That man was in sin, not because he had done something grave, no: the sin of surviving and complaining about the life of others; the sin of sadness which is the seed of the devil, of that incapacity to make a decision about one's own life, and instead to look at the life of others so as to complain. Not to criticise them: to complain. "They go first, I am the victim of this life": complaints, they breathe complaints, these people.

If we make a comparison with the man blind from birth, which we listened to last Sunday (see *Jn* 9): with what joy, how decisively did he welcome his healing, and also with how much determination did he go to speak with the doctors of the Law! This [paralytic] merely went and informed them: "Yes, it is he". Period (see v. 15). Without engaging with life… He makes me think of many of us, of the many Christians who live in this state of apathy, incapable of doing anything but complaining about everything. And apathy is a poison, it is a fog that surrounds the soul and does not allow one to live. And it is also a drug, because if you taste it often enough, you come to like it. And you become addicted to sadness, addicted to apathy. It is like the air you breathe. And this is a rather

habitual sin among us: sadness, apathy; I would not say melancholy, but it is close.

It will do us good to reread this chapter 5 of John, to understand this disease, to which we can all fall prey. Water is to save us. "But I cannot save myself" – "Why?" – "Because it is the fault of others". And I stay there for thirty-eight years…. Jesus healed me: one does not see the reaction of the others who are healed, who take their mat and dance, sing, give thanks, tell all the world! No, he just goes on. The others say to him that it should not be done, and he says, "The one who healed me said yes", and goes on his way. And then, instead of going to Jesus, to thank Him and all, he informs: "It was He". A grey life, but grey from this evil spirit that is apathy, sadness, melancholy".

Let us think, of water, of that water that is the symbol of our strength, of our life, the water that Jesus used to regenerate us: Baptism. And let us think also of ourselves, if any of us are in danger of slipping into that apathy, into that "neutral" sin: the neutral sin is this, neither white nor black, one does not know what it is. And this is a sin the devil uses to annihilate our spiritual life and also our life as people. May the Lord help us understand how bad and how evil this sin is.

Prayer for spiritual communion

Let us make spiritual communion:

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I de-

sire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there,

and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

"HAIL, FULL OF GRACE"

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Holy Mass[20]

Introduction

Today, Feast of the Incarnation of the Lord, the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, who direct, who have served in the Santa Marta Dispensary for 98 years, and are here at Mass, are renewing their vows together with their sisters in every part of the world. I would like to offer the Mass today for them, for their Congregation which always works with the sick, the poorest, as it has been here for 98 years, and for all the Sisters who are working at the moment taking care of the sick and also risking their lives and giving their lives.

Homily – Faced with mystery

The evangelist Luke (see 1: 26-38) was able to know about this [event] only from the account given by Our Lady. Listening to Luke, we have heard Our Lady who tells about this mystery. We are faced with mystery. Perhaps the best thing we can do now is to reread this passage, thinking that it is Our Lady who recounts it.

[rereads the text of the Gospel]

In that time, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to

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[20] Liturgy of the Word: *Is* 7: 10-14; 8 , 10; *Psalm* 39; *Her* 10: 4-10; *Lk* 1: 26-38. For the video, see: https://youtu.be/21KwUJZ8CdE?t=906

a man of the house of David, named Joseph. The virgin was called Mary. He came to her and said: "Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you". But she was greatly troubled by these words and wondered what a greeting like this might mean. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end". And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word". And the angel departed from her.

This is the mystery. And now the sisters will renew their vows.

Prayer for spiritual communion

Those who cannot participate in Communion will make spiritual communion:

At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I

desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers You. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You. Amen.

I DID NOT COME
ON MY OWN

Friday, 27 March 2020

Extraordinary moment of prayer presided over by Pope[21] Sagrato of St Peter's Basilica

"When evening had come" (*Mk* 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat… are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying "We are perishing" (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

It is easy to recognize ourselves in this story. What is harder to understand is Jesus' attitude. While his disciples are quite naturally alarmed and desperate, he stands in the stern, in the part of the boat that sinks first. And what does he do? In spite of the tempest, he sleeps on soundly, trusting in the Father; this is the only time in the Gospels we see Jesus sleeping. When he wakes up, after calming the wind

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[21] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/mnzTIGpYxdA?t=2769

and the waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (v. 40).

Let us try to understand. In what does the lack of the disciples' faith consist, as contrasted with Jesus' trust? They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (v. 38). *Do you not care*: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: "Do you not care about me?" It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement.

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: "Wake up, Lord!".

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you. This Lent your call reverberates urgently: "Be converted!", "Return to me with all your heart" (*Joel* 2:12). You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a *time of choosing*. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the journey, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives. This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial. It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people – often forgotten people – who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and

order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. In the face of so much suffering, where the authentic development of our peoples is assessed, we experience the priestly prayer of Jesus: "That they may all be one" (*Jn* 17:21). How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer. How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith"? Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith. We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love. In the midst of isolation when we are suf-

fering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side. The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf *Is* 42:3) that never falters, and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith"? Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter's rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (*Mt* 28:5). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (cf *1 Pet* 5:7).

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE"

Sunday, 29 March 2020

Angelus[22]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

The Gospel passage for this fifth Sunday of Lent is the resurrection of Lazarus (cf *Jn* 11:1-45). Lazarus was Martha and Mary's brother; they were good friends of Jesus. When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has already been dead for four days. Martha runs towards the Master and says to Him: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died!" (v. 21). Jesus replies to her: "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23) and adds: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (v. 25). Jesus makes himself seen as the Lord of life, he who is capable of giving life even to the dead. Then Mary and other people arrive, in tears, and so Jesus — the Gospel says — "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.... Jesus wept" (vv. 33, 35). With this turmoil in his heart, he goes to the tomb, thanks the Father who always listens to him, has the tomb opened and cries aloud: "Lazarus, come out!" (v. 43). And Lazarus emerges with "his hands and feet bound with bandages and his face wrapped with a cloth" (v. 44).

Here we can experience first hand that God is life and gives life, yet takes on the tragedy of death. Jesus could have avoided the death of his friend Lazarus, but he wanted to share in our suffering for the death of people dear to us, and above all, he wished to demonstrate God's dominion over death. In this Gospel passage we see that the faith of man and the omnipotence of God, of God's love, seek each

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[22] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/OMbH-STG7DY

other and finally meet. It is like a two lane street: the faith of man and the omnipotence of God's love seek each other and finally meet. We see this in the cry of Martha and Mary, and of all of us with them: "If you had been here!". And God's answer is not a speech, no, God's answer to the problem of death is Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life" ... have faith. Amid grief, continue to have faith, even when it seems that death has won. Take away the stone from your heart! Let the Word of God restore life where there is death.

Today, too, Jesus repeats to us: "Take away the stone". God did not create us for the tomb, but rather he created us for life, [which is] beautiful, good, joyful. But "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (*Wis* 2:24) says the Book of Wisdom, and Jesus Christ came to free us from its bonds.

We are thus called to take away the stones of all that suggests death: for example, the hypocrisy with which faith is lived, is death; the destructive criticism of others, is death; insults, slander, are death; the marginalization of the poor, is death. The Lord asks us to remove these stones from our hearts, and life will then flourish again around us. Christ lives, and those who welcome him and follow him come into contact with life. Without Christ, or outside of Christ, not only is life not present, but one falls back into death.

The resurrection of Lazarus is also a sign of the regeneration that occurs in the believer through Baptism, with full integration within the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Through the action and power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is a person who journeys in life as a new creature: a creature for life, who goes towards life.

May the Virgin Mary help us to be compassionate like her son Jesus, who made our suffering his own. May each of us be close to those who are in difficulty, becoming for them a reflection of God's love and tenderness, which frees us from death and makes life victorious.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, the Secretary-General of the United Nations recently launched an appeal for an "immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world", citing the current Covid-19 crisis, which does not recognise borders. An appeal for a total ceasefire.

I join those who have welcomed this appeal and I invite everyone to follow it by ceasing all forms of hostility, promoting the creation of humanitarian aid routes, openness to diplomacy, and attentiveness to those who are in situations of great vulnerability.

May our joint fight against the pandemic bring everyone to recognize the great need to reinforce brotherly and sisterly bonds as members of a single human family. In particular, may it inspire a renewed commitment to overcome rivalries among the leaders of nations and the parties involved. Conflicts cannot be resolved through war! Antagonism and differences must be overcome through dialogue and a constructive search for peace.

At this time, my thoughts turn especially to all those people who suffer the vulnerability of being compelled to live in a group: rest homes, barracks…. In particular I would like to mention those who are in prison. I read an official note by the Commission for Human Rights which mentions the problem of overcrowded prisons, which could become a tragedy. I ask the authorities to be sensitive to this serious problem and to take the necessary measures to avoid future tragedies.

I wish everyone a Happy Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me; I do so for you. Enjoy your lunch.

Arrivederci.

THEY PREPARED THE PASSOVER

Sunday, 5 April 2020

Celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Holy Mass[23]

Homily

Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil* 2:7). Let us allow these words of the Apostle Paul to lead us into these holy days, when the word of God, like a refrain, presents Jesus as *servant*: on Holy Thursday, he is portrayed as the servant who washes the feet of his disciples; on Good Friday, he is presented as the suffering and victorious servant (cf *Is* 52:13); and tomorrow we will hear the prophecy of Isaiah about him: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold" (*Is* 42:1). God saved us *by serving us*. We often think we are the ones who serve God. No, he is the one who freely chose to serve us, for he loved us first. It is difficult to love and not be loved in return. And it is even more difficult to serve if we do not let ourselves be served by God.

But – just one question – how did the Lord serve us? By giving his life for us. We are dear to him; we cost him dearly. Saint Angela of Foligno said she once heard Jesus say: "My love for you is no joke". His love for us led him to sacrifice himself and to take upon himself our sins. This

[23] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/_Jrr-UpLIeM

astonishes us: God saved us by taking upon himself all the punishment of our sins. Without complaining, but with the humility, patience and obedience of a servant, and purely out of love. And the Father *upheld* Jesus in his service. He did not take away the evil that crushed him, but rather strengthened him in his suffering so that our evil could be overcome by good, by a love that loves to the very end.

The Lord served us to the point of experiencing the most painful situations of those who love: *betrayal* and *abandonment*.

Betrayal. Jesus suffered betrayal by the disciple who sold him and by the disciple who denied him. He was betrayed by the people who sang hosanna to him and then shouted: "Crucify him!" (*Mt* 27:22). He was betrayed by the religious institution that unjustly condemned him and by the political institution that washed its hands of him. We can think of all the small or great betrayals that we have suffered in life. It is terrible to discover that a firmly placed trust has been betrayed. From deep within our heart a disappointment surges up that can even make life seem meaningless. This happens because we were born to be loved and to love, and the most painful thing is to be betrayed by someone who promised to be loyal and close to us. We cannot even imagine how painful it was for God who *is* love.

Let us look within. If we are honest with ourselves, we will see our infidelities. How many falsehoods, hypocrisies and duplicities! How many good intentions be-

trayed! How many broken promises! How many resolutions left unfulfilled! The Lord knows our hearts better than we do. He knows how weak and irresolute we are, how many times we fall, how hard it is for us to get up and how difficult it is to heal certain wounds. And what did he do in order to come to our aid and serve us? He told us through the Prophet: "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them deeply" (*Hos* 14:5). He healed us by taking upon himself our infidelity and by taking from us our betrayals. Instead of being discouraged by the fear of failing, we can now look upon the crucifix, feel his embrace, and say: "Behold, there is my infidelity, you took it, Jesus, upon yourself. You open your arms to me, you serve me with your love, you continue to support me… And so I will keep pressing on".

Abandonment. In today's Gospel, Jesus says one thing from the Cross, one thing alone: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Mt* 27:46). These are powerful words. Jesus had suffered the abandonment of his own, who had fled. But the Father remained for him. Now, in the abyss of solitude, for the first time he calls him by the generic name "God". And "in a loud voice" he asks the question "why?", the most excruciating "why?": "Why did you too abandon me?". These words are in fact those of a Psalm (cf 22:2); they tell us that Jesus also brought the experience of extreme desolation to his prayer. But the fact remains that he himself experienced that desolation: he experienced the utmost abandonment, which the Gospels testify to by quoting his very words.

Why did all this take place? Once again, it was done for our sake, to *serve* us. So that when we have our back to the wall, when we find ourselves at a dead end, with no light and no way of escape, when it seems that God himself is not responding, we should remember that we are not alone. Jesus experienced total abandonment in a situation he had never before experienced in order to be one with us in everything. He did it for me, for you, for all of us; he did it to say to us: "Do not be afraid, you are not alone. I experienced all your desolation in order to be ever close to you". That is the extent to which Jesus served us: he descended into the abyss of our most bitter sufferings, culminating in betrayal and abandonment. Today, in the tragedy of a pandemic, in the face of the many false securities that have now crumbled, in the face of so many hopes betrayed, in the sense of abandonment that weighs upon our hearts, Jesus says to each one of us: "Courage, open your heart to my love. You will feel the consolation of God who sustains you".

Dear brothers and sisters, what can we do in comparison with God, who served us even to the point of being betrayed and abandoned? We can refuse to betray him for whom we were created, and not abandon what really matters in our lives. We were put in this world to love him and our neighbours. Everything else passes away, only this remains. The tragedy we are experiencing at this time summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that *life is of no use if not used to serve others*. For life

is measured by love. So, in these holy days, in our homes, let us stand before the Crucified One – look upon the Crucified One! – the fullest measure of God's love for us, and before the God who serves us to the point of giving his life, and, – fixing our gaze on the Crucified One – let us ask for the grace to *live in order to serve*. May we reach out to those who are suffering and those most in need. May we not be concerned about what we lack, but what good we can do for others.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold. The Father, who sustained Jesus in his Passion also supports us in our efforts to serve. Loving, praying, forgiving, caring for others, in the family and in society: all this can certainly be difficult. It can feel like a *via crucis*. But the path of service is the victorious and life giving path by which we were saved. I would like to say this especially to young people, on this Day which has been dedicated to them for thirty-five years now. Dear friends, look at the *real heroes* who come to light in these days: they are not famous, rich and successful people; rather, they are those who are giving themselves in order to serve others. Feel called yourselves to put your lives on the line. Do not be afraid to devote your life to God and to others; it pays! For life is a gift we receive only when we give ourselves away, and our deepest joy comes from saying yes to love, without ifs and buts. To truly say yes to love, without ifs and buts. As Jesus did for us.

Angelus[24]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Before concluding this liturgy, I would like to greet all those taking part via the means of social communication. In particular, my thoughts turn to young people all over the world, who are living today's World Youth Day, celebrated at the diocesan level, in an unprecedented way. The handing over of the Cross from the youth of Panama to those of Lisbon was to have taken place today. This very significant gesture has been postponed to Christ the King Sunday, this coming 22 November. While waiting for that moment, I urge you young people to nurture and witness the hope, generosity and solidarity that we all need at this difficult time.

Tomorrow, [Monday] 6 April, is the United Nations International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. Many sporting events have been suspended during this period. However, the best fruits of sports are emerging: resistance, team spirit, fraternity, giving the best of oneself.... So, let's launch sports for peace and development once again.

Dear friends, let us journey in faith toward Holy Week when Jesus suffers, dies and rises. The people and families who are unable to participate in the liturgical celebrations are invited to gather together in prayer at home, also aided by the means of technology. Let us spiritual-

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[24] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/_Jrr-UpLIeM

ly gather around the sick and their families, and all those who care for them with self-denial. Let us pray for the deceased in the light of paschal faith. Everyone is present in our hearts, in our thoughts, in our prayers.

May we learn from Mary, that inner silence, that gaze of the heart, that loving faith, so as to follow Jesus on the way of the cross that leads to the glory of the Resurrection. She walks with us and sustains our hope.

HE LOVED THEM TO THE END

Thursday, 9 April 2020

Mass of the Lord's Supper[25]

Homily – Eucharist, service, anointing.

This is what we experience in today's celebration: the Lord who wants to remain with us in the *Eucharist*. And we become the Lord's tabernacles, carrying the Lord with us; to the point that he himself tells us: if we do not eat his body and drink his blood, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. This is a mystery, bread and wine, the Lord with us, within us, inside us.

Service. This gesture is the condition to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yes, to serve... everyone. But the Lord, in the words he exchanged with Peter (cf *Jn* 13:6-9), makes him realize that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must let the Lord serve us, that the servant of God be our servant. And this is hard to understand. If I do not let the Lord be my servant, do not let allow the Lord wash me, help me grow, forgive me, then I will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And the *priesthood* too. Today I would like to be close to priests, to all priests, from the most recently ordained right up to the Pope. We are all priests. The bishops too, all of us... we are *anointed*, anointed by the Lord; anointed to confect the Eucharist, anointed to serve.

There is no Chrism Mass today – I hope we can have it before Pentecost, otherwise it will have to be postponed

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[25] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/p-dYrQLEYiw

to next year – but I cannot let tonight's Mass pass by without remembering priests. Priests who offer their lives for the Lord, priests who are servants. In these days many of them have died, more than sixty here in Italy, while tending to the sick in hospital, together with doctors and nurses... They are "saints next door", priests who have given their lives in serving.

I think too of those who are far away. Today I received a letter from a priest, a chaplain in a prison far away, who told me how he was spending this Holy Week with the prisoners. A Franciscan priest. Priests who travel far to bring the Gospel and who die far away. A bishop told me once that the first thing he did on arriving in these mission posts was to go to the cemetery, to the graves of priests who gave their lives there, young priests who died from local diseases because they were not prepared, they didn't have the antibodies; and no one knew their names: anonymous priests. Then there are the parish priests in the countryside, pastors of four, five, seven little villages in the mountains, who go from one to the other, who know the people. One of them once told me that he knew the name of every person in his villages. I asked him, "Really?" And he told me "I even know the dogs' names!". They know everyone. Priestly closeness. Good, good priests.

Today I carry you in my heart and I carry you to the altar. Also priests who are slandered. This happens often today; they cannot walk about freely because people say bad things about them, referring to the scandal from discovering priests who have done bad things. Some of them have told me that they cannot go out wearing clerics because people insult them. Yet they carry on. Priests who are sinners, together with bishops and the Pope who is

also a sinner, must not forget to ask forgiveness and learn how to forgive because they know that they need to ask forgiveness and to forgive. We are all sinners. Priests who suffer from crises, who do not know what to do, who live in darkness...

Today you are all with me, brother priests, at the altar, you who are consecrated. I say to you just one thing: do not be stubborn like Peter. Let your feet be washed, the Lord is your servant, he is close to you, and he gives you strength to wash the feet of others.

In this way, conscious of the need to be washed clean, you will be great dispensers of forgiveness. Forgive! Have a big heart that is generous in forgiving. This is the measure by which we will be judged. As you have forgiven, so you will be forgiven, in the same measure. Do not be afraid to forgive. Sometimes we have doubts; look to Christ [he looks to the Crucifix]. There, there is forgiveness for all. Be courageous, also in taking risks, in forgiving, in order to bring consolation. And if you cannot give sacramental pardon at this moment, then at least give the consolation of a brother to those you accompany, leaving the door open for people to return.

I thank God for the grace of the priesthood, we all give thanks. I thank God for you, priests. Jesus loves you! He asks only that you let him wash your feet.

HE HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Saturday, 11 April 2020

Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter[26]

Homily

"After the Sabbath" (*Mt* 28:1), the women went to the tomb. This is how the Gospel of this holy Vigil began: with the Sabbath. It is the day of the Easter Triduum that we tend to neglect as we eagerly await the passage from Friday's cross to Easter Sunday's Alleluia. This year however, we are experiencing, more than ever, the great silence of Holy Saturday. We can imagine ourselves in the position of the women on that day. They, like us, had before their eyes the drama of suffering, of an unexpected tragedy that happened all too suddenly. They had seen death and it weighed on their hearts. Pain was mixed with fear: would they suffer the same fate as the Master? Then too there was fear about the future and all that would need to be rebuilt. A painful memory, a hope cut short. For them, as for us, it was the darkest hour.

Yet in this situation the women did not allow themselves to be paralyzed. They did not give in to the gloom of sorrow and regret, they did not morosely close in on themselves, or flee from reality. They were doing something simple yet extraordinary: preparing at home the spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They did not stop loving; in the darkness of their hearts, they lit a flame of mercy. Our Lady spent that Saturday, the day that would

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[26] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/k2ov5GZCqN0

be dedicated to her, in prayer and hope. She responded to sorrow with trust in the Lord. Unbeknownst to these women, they were making preparations, in the darkness of that Sabbath, for "the dawn of the first day of the week", the day that would change history. Jesus, like a seed buried in the ground, was about to make new life blossom in the world; and these women, by prayer and love, were helping to make that hope flower. How many people, in these sad days, have done and are still doing what those women did, sowing seeds of hope! With small gestures of care, affection and prayer.

At dawn the women went to the tomb. There the angel says to them: "Do not be afraid. He is not here; for he has risen" (vv. 5-6). They hear the words of life even as they stand before a tomb... And then they meet Jesus, the giver of all hope, who confirms the message and says: "Do not be afraid" (v. 10). *Do not be afraid*, *do not yield to fear*: This is the *message of hope*. It is addressed to us, today. These are the words that God repeats to us this very night.

Tonight we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: *the right to hope*. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. No! It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, "All will be well", clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus' hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.

The grave is the place where no one who enters ever leaves. But Jesus emerged for us; he rose for us, to bring life where there was death, to begin a new story in the very place where a stone had been placed. He, who rolled away the stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb, can also remove the stones in our hearts. So, let us not give in to resignation; let us not place a stone before hope. We can and must hope, because God is faithful. He did not abandon us; he visited us and entered into our situations of pain, anguish and death. His light dispelled the darkness of the tomb: today he wants that light to penetrate even to the darkest corners of our lives. Dear sister, dear brother, even if in your heart you have buried hope, do not give up: God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!

Courage. This is a word often spoken by Jesus in the Gospels. Only once do others say it, to encourage a person in need: "Courage; rise, [Jesus] is calling you!" (*Mk* 10:49). It is he, the Risen One, who raises us up from our neediness. If, on your journey, you feel weak and frail, or fall, do not be afraid, God holds out a helping hand and says to you: "Courage!". You might say, as did Don Abbondio (in Manzoni's novel), "Courage is not something you can give yourself" (*I Promessi Sposi,* XXV). True, you cannot give it to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. All you have to do is open your heart in prayer and roll away, however slightly, that stone placed at the entrance to your heart so that Jesus' light can enter. You only need to ask him: "Jesus, come to me amid my fears and tell me too: Courage!" With you, Lord, we will be tested but not shaken. And, whatever sadness may dwell in us, we will be strengthened in hope, since with you the cross leads to the

resurrection, because you are with us in the darkness of our nights; you are certainty amid our uncertainties, the word that speaks in our silence, and nothing can ever rob us of the love you have for us.

This is the Easter message, a message of hope. It contains a second part, the sending forth. "Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee" (*Mt* 28:10), Jesus says. "He is going before you to Galilee" (v. 7), the angel says. The Lord goes before us; he goes before us always. It is encouraging to know that he walks ahead of us in life and in death; he goes before us to Galilee, that is, to the place which for him and his disciples evoked the idea of daily life, family and work. Jesus wants us to bring hope there, to our everyday life. For the disciples, Galilee was also the place of remembrance, for it was the place where they were first called. Returning to Galilee means remembering that we have been loved and called by God. Each one of us has their own Galilee. We need to resume the journey, reminding ourselves that we are born and reborn thanks to an invitation given gratuitously to us out of love, there in our respective Galilees. This is always the point from which we can set out anew, especially in times of crisis and trial, remembering our Galilee.

But there is more. Galilee was the farthest region from where they were: from Jerusalem. And not only geographically. Galilee was also the farthest place from the sacredness of the Holy City. It was an area where people of different religions lived: it was the "Galilee of the Gentiles" (*Mt* 4:15). Jesus sends them there and asks them to start again from there. What does this tell us? That the message of hope should not be confined to our sacred places, but should be brought to everyone. For everyone

is in need of reassurance, and if we, who have touched "the Word of life" (*1 Jn* 1:1) do not give it, who will? How beautiful it is to be Christians who offer consolation, who bear the burdens of others and who offer encouragement: messengers of life in a time of death! In every Galilee, in every area of the human family to which we all belong and which is part of us – for we are all brothers and sisters – may we bring the song of life! Let us silence the cries of death, no more wars! May we stop the production and trade of weapons, since we need bread, not guns. Let the abortion and killing of innocent lives end. May the hearts of those who have enough be open to filling the empty hands of those who do not have the bare necessities.

Those women, in the end, "took hold" of Jesus' feet (*Mt* 28:9); feet that had travelled so far to meet us, to the point of entering and emerging from the tomb. The women embraced the feet that had trampled death and opened the way of hope. Today, as pilgrims in search of hope, we cling to you, Risen Jesus. We turn our backs on death and open our hearts to you, for you are Life itself.

"Do not be afraid.
Go tell my brothers"

13 April 2020

Regina Caeli[27]

Today, Easter Monday of the Angel, the joyous proclamation of Christ's Resurrection resounds. The Gospel passage (cf *Mt* 28:8-15) narrates that the frightened women, quickly left Jesus' tomb which they had found empty. But Jesus himself appears to them on the way, saying: "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (v. 10). With these words, the Risen One entrusts the women with a missionary mandate for the Apostles. Indeed, they offered an admirable example of faithfulness, of dedication, and of love for Christ throughout the time of his public life, as well as during his passion. Now they are rewarded by him with this gesture of attention and predilection. The women always at the beginning: Mary at the beginning, women at the beginning.

First, the women, then the disciples, and Peter in particular, bear witness to the reality of the resurrection. Jesus had foretold to them a number of times that, after his passion and cross, he would rise again. But the disciples had not understood because they were not yet ready. Their faith needed a leap in quality that could only be inspired by the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Risen One.

At the beginning of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we hear Peter declare with frankness, courage and

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[27] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/vY3W0CHo1d8

candour: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (*Acts* 2:32). As if to say: "I put myself on the line for him. I give my life for him": And later, he would give his life for him. From that moment on, the proclamation that Christ is risen has spread everywhere and has reached the four corners of the earth, becoming the message of hope for everyone. Jesus' Resurrection tells us that death does not have the last word, but rather life does. In raising his Only-begotten Son, God the Father has fully manifested his love and his mercy for humanity of all time.

If Christ has risen, it is possible to look with hope at every event of our existence, even the most difficult ones, those charged with anguish and uncertainty. This is the Easter message that we are called to proclaim with words, and above all through the witness of life. May this news resound in our homes and in our hearts: "Christ, my hope, has arisen!" (Easter Sequence). May this certainty strengthen the faith of every baptised person and above all, encourage those who are facing greater suffering and difficulty.

May Mary, the silent witness of the death and resurrection of her son, Jesus, help us to believe strongly in this mystery of salvation: when it is welcomed with faith, it can change our lives. This is the Easter wish that I renew to each of you. I entrust it to her, our Mother, whom we now invoke with the prayer, the Regina Caeli.

After praying

Dear brothers and sisters, we have heard that women proclaimed Jesus' Resurrection to the disciples. Today I would like to call to mind the efforts that so many women

are making in order to take care of others, even during this health crisis: women doctors, nurses, agents of law enforcement and prisons, employees in stores providing basic necessities…, and many mothers and sisters and grandmothers who are confined to their homes with their entire family, with children, the elderly, and the disabled. At times, they are at risk of enduring violence due to a living situation in which they bear a burden that is too heavy. Let us pray for them, so that the Lord may grant them strength, and our communities may support them together with their families. May the Lord give us the courage of women, to always go forward.

This Easter week I would like to remember with closeness and affection all the countries that are being seriously affected by the coronavirus, some of them with large numbers of people infected and deceased, in particular Italy, the United States of America, Spain, France … the list is long. I pray for them. And do not forget that the Pope prays for you and is close to you.

I renew my heartfelt Easter greetings to everyone. Let us remain united in prayer and in the commitment to help each other as brothers and sisters.

Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*

"My Lord and my God!"

19 April 2020

Second Sunday of Easter

Holy Mass On The Liturical Fest Of Divine Mercy[28]

Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia

Homily

Last Sunday we celebrated the Lord's resurrection; today we witness the resurrection of his disciple. It has already been a week, a week since the disciples had seen the Risen Lord, but in spite of this, they remained fearful, cringing behind "closed doors" (*Jn* 20:26), unable even to convince Thomas, the only one absent, of the resurrection. What does Jesus do in the face of this timorous lack of belief? He returns and, standing in the same place, "in the midst" of the disciples, he repeats his greeting: "Peace be with you!" (*Jn* 20:19, 26). He starts all over. The resurrection of his disciple begins here, from this *faithful and patient mercy*, from the discovery that God never tires of reaching out to lift us up when we fall. He wants us to see him, not as a taskmaster with whom we have to settle accounts, but as our Father who always raises us up. In life we go forward tentatively, uncertainly, like a toddler who takes a few steps and falls; a few steps more and falls again, yet each time his father puts him back on his feet. The hand that always puts us back on our feet is mercy: God knows that without mercy we will remain on the ground, that in order to keep walking, we need to be put back on our feet.

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[28] For the video, see: https://youtu.be/WTrmSwjJ5Qo

You may object: "But I keep falling!". The Lord knows this and he is always ready to raise you up. He does not want us to keep thinking about our failings; rather, he wants us to look to him. For when we fall, he sees children needing to be put back on their feet; in our failings he sees children in need of his merciful love. Today, in this church that has become a shrine of mercy in Rome, and on this Sunday that Saint John Paul II dedicated to Divine Mercy twenty years ago, we confidently welcome this message. Jesus said to Saint Faustina: "I am love and mercy itself; there is no human misery that could measure up to my mercy" (*Diary*, 14 September 1937). At one time, the Saint, with satisfaction, told Jesus that she had offered him all of her life and all that she had. But Jesus' answer stunned her: "You have not offered me the thing is truly yours". What had that holy nun kept for herself? Jesus said to her with kindness: "My daughter, give me your failings" (10 October 1937). We too can ask ourselves: "Have I given my failings to the Lord? Have I let him see me fall so that he can raise me up?" Or is there something I still keep inside me? A sin, a regret from the past, a wound that I have inside, a grudge against someone, an idea about a particular person… The Lord waits for us to offer him our failings so that he can help us experience his mercy.

Let us go back to the disciples. They had abandoned the Lord at his Passion and felt guilty. But meeting them, Jesus did not give a long sermon. To them, who were wounded within, he shows his own wounds. Thomas can now touch them and know of Jesus' love and how much Jesus had suffered for him, even though he had abandoned him. In those wounds, he touches with his hands God's tender closeness. Thomas arrived late, but once he

received mercy, he overtook the other disciples: he believed not only in the resurrection, but in the boundless love of God. And he makes the most simple and beautiful profession of faith: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). Here is the resurrection of the disciple: it is accomplished when his frail and wounded humanity enters into that of Jesus. There, every doubt is resolved; there, God becomes *my God*; there, we begin to accept ourselves and to love life as it is.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the time of trial that we are presently undergoing, we too, like Thomas, with our fears and our doubts, have experienced our frailty. We need the Lord, who sees beyond that frailty an irrepressible beauty. With him we rediscover how precious we are even in our vulnerability. We discover that we are like beautiful crystals, fragile and at the same time precious. And if, like crystal, we are transparent before him, his light – the light of mercy – will shine in us and through us in the world. As the Letter of Peter said, this is a reason for being "filled with joy, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials" (*1 Pt* 1:6).

On this feast of Divine Mercy, the most beautiful message comes from Thomas, the disciple who arrived late; he was the only one missing. But the Lord waited for Thomas. Mercy does not abandon those who stay behind. Now, while we are looking forward to a slow and arduous recovery from the pandemic, there is a danger that we will forget those who are left behind. The risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of *selfish indifference*. A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me. It begins there and ends up selecting one

person over another, discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress. The present pandemic, however, reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer. We are all frail, all equal, all precious. May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family! Let us learn from the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles. It received mercy and lived with mercy: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (*Acts* 2:44-45). This is not some ideology: it is Christianity.

In that community, after the resurrection of Jesus, only one was left behind and the others waited for him. Today the opposite seems to be the case: a small part of the human family has moved ahead, while the majority has remained behind. Each of us could say: "These are complex problems, it is not my job to take care of the needy, others have to be concerned with it!". Saint Faustina, after meeting Jesus, wrote: "In a soul that is suffering we should see Jesus on the cross, not a parasite and a burden... [Lord] you give us the chance to practise deeds of mercy, and we practise making judgements" (*Diary*, 6 September 1937). Yet she herself complained one day to Jesus that, in being merciful, one is thought to be naive. She said, "Lord, they often abuse my goodness". And Jesus replied: "Never mind, don't let it bother you, just be merciful to everyone always" (24 December 1937). To everyone: let us not think only of our interests, our vested interests. Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our col-

lective future, a future for all without discarding anyone. Because without an all-embracing vision, there will be no future for anyone.

Today the simple and disarming love of Jesus revives the heart of his disciple. Like the apostle Thomas, let us accept mercy, the salvation of the world. And let us show mercy to those who are most vulnerable; for only in this way will we build a new world.

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Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (*Mt* 28:5). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (cf *1Pet* 5:7).

Franciscus

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