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Homilies of the Prelate of Opus Dei during Holy Week

We offer a translation of the
homilies preached by
Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz
during the Easter Triduum.

04/15/2022

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Easter Vigil Homily (2022)

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared” (*Lk* 24:1). The same women who had followed our Lord to the Cross are now going to embalm the dead body of Jesus. It was a gesture that no one else dared to do out of fear for the authorities. Neither the people who acclaimed Him when he entered Jerusalem, nor the apostles: only these women. Their courageous attitude reveals the mission of the “feminine genius” in the world, as Pope Francis said: “They teach us to value rightly, to love tenderly, to make the world a beautiful place” (Pope Francis, Homily, 9 February 2017). While the rest of Jesus’ followers remained locked up in their despair, they wanted to show this last small sign of affection for our Lord’s body. They were convinced that by doing so the world, even amid the deepest

darkness, would be a bit more beautiful.

God, however, had a surprise in store for these women. Instead of the dead body of Jesus, they found two angels who said to them: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (*Lk* 24:5). Those who follow Christ faithfully open themselves to surprises like this. He always exceeds our expectations, our dreams, our plans. These women were content to say a final farewell to their Lord, and suddenly they receive this news: Jesus is alive. So bewildered and frightened were they that they simply stood “with their faces bowed to the ground” (*Lk* 24:5). But recalling Jesus’ words, that it was fitting He be crucified in order to rise again, their fear quickly turns to joy. And this was their reaction: to announce to everyone that Jesus had risen. In a certain sense, one could

say that they were “apostles of apostles.”

This mission wasn't something imposed on them, but the most natural thing they could do. It is the spontaneous impulse of someone who has received a gift that fills their heart and changes their life: Christ is alive. This is the foundation of our faith, of our hope, of our love: Jesus has risen. He has broken the chains of death. Evil no longer has the final word, but rather the Son of God. We Christians, like these women, have to communicate this news to others: God has shown us his immense love in Christ who died and rose for each one of us.

“As Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life,” writes Saint Paul (*Rom 6:4*). Jesus' resurrection has renewed our whole life. This certainty makes all our

actions fruitful, although often it is not entirely visible. This is the strength of the new life of the resurrection.

“Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (*Lk 24,5*). This new life makes our Lord the center of our yearnings and deepest desires. If we base our happiness on things here below – on pleasure, on success, on wealth... – it is as though we were searching among the dead for the one who is alive. Christ invites us to raise our sights, to live with the certainty that we are loved by Him. That love, which doesn’t change, fulfills the deepest desires of our heart.

As Saint Josemaría said, the resurrection “shows us that God does not abandon his own ... His delight is still to be with the sons of men.” Christ remains among us in his Church, especially in the Eucharist,

“the source and the culmination of his presence in the world” (Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102). And He also remains in each one, just as He had promised the apostles: “If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him” (*Jn* 14:23). Each Christian is called to identify themselves with Christ: to think, react and act as our Lord would; in short, to seek union with Jesus in everything we do.

We have the right to think that the first person to whom the Risen Jesus appeared was his Mother. During the three previous days, Mary would have awaited this moment with a hope that overflowed with joy at having Him with her again. We can ask our Lady to help us to accompany the Risen Jesus with the same joy, knowing that a new life has been opened to us.

Good Friday Homily (2022)

We have just read the story of the Passion and accompanied Jesus from Gethsemane to Calvary. Among all the persons who appear on this path, I would like to focus on three, to whom Jesus directs a special look: Peter, John and our Lady.

The Peter we witness here is very different than the one at the Last Supper. There we saw an energetic Peter, capable of doing anything for our Lord: “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (*Lk* 22:33). He had said this with full conviction. And indeed, we see him put this resolve into practice in the Garden of Gethsemane. He drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest. He wanted to defend the Master, even with all the risk that this entailed.

But at the time of the trial, when Jesus is being interrogated, he is

unable to stand up for his Lord, and swears he never met Him. His bitter tears afterwards express his sorrow and mark the beginning of his conversion. From then on Peter will not rely on his own strength, but on his contrition. Peter will now be much more of a Rock than before, because he is more aware of his weakness and of the greatness of God's love. The look that Jesus directs to him, as later on the shore of the lake, is not a reproach, but a confirmation of his role as head of the Church: "a look that reaches his heart and unleashes tears of repentance" (Pope Francis, Homily, 29 June 2016).

As for John, we know he was "the beloved disciple." He was the adolescent apostle who "loved Christ with all the purity and tenderness of a heart that has never been corrupted" (Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 266). From his youth,

Christ had become the center of his existence, and that is why we find him very close to Him throughout the Passion until his death on the Cross. He wasn't concerned about being recognized as one of his disciples.

Thus John shows us a courageous and unapologetic testimony and is not afraid to stand up for his Lord in the most trying moments. We see him mingled with the crowd during the trial, at the scourging, on the way to Calvary. When perhaps the easiest thing would have been to flee, like the rest, he remains. Without fearing those around him, he shows himself as he is: a person in love with Christ. Jesus crucified on the Cross would surely have given him a grateful look for his fidelity and, above all, for looking after our Lady on that day of sorrow. That is why He exclaimed: "Behold, your mother" (*Jn 19:27*).

This leads us to turn our eyes now to our Lady. The day has come when Simeon's prophecy has come true: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also" (*Lk* 2:35). There is no sorrow like her sorrow. But she doesn't flee. Like her Son, who embraced the Cross that would cause his death, Mary also "embraces" his Passion and accompanies Jesus in each moment of his suffering. "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (*Mt* 12:50). Mary is the mother of Jesus not only in a physical sense, but also because of her perfect union with God's will, which she embraces now without any reservation.

The thirst that our Lord has in those moments is a thirst for our salvation, for our happiness. And looking at his Mother now, He finds in her a comforting look that relieves his thirst. Just by her presence, Mary

offered Him the greatest possible consolation. That is why Christ gave us his Mother, so that we too can find the same consolation in her.

Jesus also looks at each one of us. When like Peter we deny Him, He looks at us and invites us to be faithful to our vocation as Christians. And as He looked at John, Jesus looks at us with grateful love when, with an undivided heart, we faithfully follow Him in the darkest moments. And as He looked at our Lady, Jesus looks at us with the eagerness to find in us the same consolation that He found in his Mother.

Holy Thursday Homily (2022)

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (*Jn 13:1*). During these days of the Easter Triduum we

are going to remember that “love to the end” of Jesus. A love that is not abstract, but concrete, shown constantly during his earthly existence.

How does Jesus show us this boundless love? First of all, Saint John tells us that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples. Jesus carries out a task reserved for servants. As He himself had already said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (*Mt 20:28*). When the apostles argued about who would be the greatest among them, Jesus said that “whoever would be first among you must be your servant” (*Mt 20:27*). By this gesture of washing their feet, our Lord makes himself the servant of all. “While the great ones on earth build ‘thrones’ for their own power,” Pope Francis says, “God chooses an uncomfortable throne, the Cross, from which to reign and give life.”

Serving others is not something humiliating. Rather it is the highest thing we can do, since it embodies the way Christ lived.

But Jesus' love was expressed not only in this gesture. In the second reading, we have just heard the account of the Last Supper in words of Saint Paul. "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (1 Cor 11:24-25). Jesus has stayed with us forever. Saint Josemaría used the image of photographs exchanged between people in love to remind themselves of one another when life has separated them. But what Christ has left us is not simply an image or a memory: "He himself remains. He will go to the Father, but he will remain with us" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 83).

Jesus knows our weaknesses. By becoming man, He wanted to experience the limitations of human nature, except for sin. He knows that our life involves difficulties and suffering. Therefore his “love to the end” led Him to give himself as food, which strengthens us. Every time we receive Him we are united to Him, we are transformed into the One who is incarnate love. “When we nourish ourselves with faith on his Body and Blood, his love passes into us and makes us capable in turn of laying down our lives for our brethren” (Benedict XVI, Angelus, 18 March 2007).

In the first reading, we recalled the institution of the Passover meal, the memorial of being freed from slavery in Egypt. It is a prophetic image of the Passover of Christ, who frees the world from sin. The Passion is the culmination of Jesus’ “love to the end” for mankind: “Greater love

has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn* 15:13). A father, when he sees his son suffering, suffers with him, and does everything in his power to alleviate that pain. And God, seeing us slaves to sin, did not hesitate to send his only Son to give us a deeper liberation than the one experienced by the people of Israel: the freedom of the children of God. We are no longer at the mercy of the Evil One. Jesus, with his Passion, has defeated the prince of this world. And now we too can say with Saint Paul: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (*Phil* 4:13).

Jesus loves us to the end. Without limits, but in specific ways. He washes our feet at each confession, cleansing us of our sins. He offers himself to us as food in the Eucharist, so that we may find strength in our daily struggle to live as children of God. Today we can ask our Mother

Holy Mary to teach us to welcome without limits the “love to the end” of her Son.

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