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Holy Week with the Pope: Homilies, Videos and More

In his April 1st letter, the Prelate of Opus Dei encouraged us to "take advantage of the opportunities that technology offers to follow the Holy Week services united to the Pope." To help you do this, this article will be updated during the week with the Pope's homilies, messages, and more.

04/08/2020

Schedule of Pope's Holy Week Services

Pope Francis will celebrate all of the Holy Week Rites in St. Peter's Basilica, without the presence of the faithful, starting with **Palm Sunday** at **11 AM (Rome time) on Sunday, April 5th.**

You can follow ALL the services here, or on alternative channels:

The rest of the Holy Week services are as follows (all times Rome time):

—9 April 2020 @ 6 PM: Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper

—10 April 2020 @ 6 PM: Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion

—10 April 2020 @ 9 PM: Via Crucis (in St. Peter's Square)

—11 April 2020 @ 9 PM: Easter Vigil Mass

—12 April 2020 @ 11 AM: Easter Sunday Mass; "Urbi et Orbi" to follow.

You can follow all of these services on the YouTube video displayed above.

Easter "Urbi et Orbi" Message

Dear brothers and sisters, Happy Easter!

Today the Church's proclamation echoes throughout the world: "Jesus Christ is risen!" – "He is truly risen!".

Like a new flame this Good News springs up in the night: the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges and now oppressed by a

pandemic severely testing our whole human family. In this night, the Church's voice rings out: "Christ, my hope, has arisen!" (Easter Sequence).

This is a different "contagion", a message transmitted from heart to heart – for every human heart awaits this Good News. It is the contagion of hope: "Christ, my hope, is risen!". This is no magic formula that makes problems vanish. No, the resurrection of Christ is not that. Instead, it is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not "by-pass" suffering and death, but passes through them, opening a path in the abyss, transforming evil into good: this is the unique hallmark of the power of God.

The Risen Lord is also the Crucified One, not someone else. In his glorious body he bears indelible wounds: wounds that have become windows of hope. Let us turn our

gaze to him that he may heal the wounds of an afflicted humanity.

Today my thoughts turn in the first place to the many who have been directly affected by the coronavirus: the sick, those who have died and family members who mourn the loss of their loved ones, to whom, in some cases, they were unable even to bid a final farewell. May the Lord of life welcome the departed into his kingdom and grant comfort and hope to those still suffering, especially the elderly and those who are alone. May he never withdraw his consolation and help from those who are especially vulnerable, such as persons who work in nursing homes, or live in barracks and prisons. For many, this is an Easter of solitude lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties.

This disease has not only deprived us of human closeness, but also of the possibility of receiving in person the consolation that flows from the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation. In many countries, it has not been possible to approach them, but the Lord has not left us alone! United in our prayer, we are convinced that he has laid his hand upon us (cf. *Ps* 138:5), firmly reassuring us: Do not be afraid, “I have risen and I am with you still!” (cf. *Roman Missal*, Entrance Antiphon, Mass of Easter Sunday).

May Jesus, our Passover, grant strength and hope to doctors and nurses, who everywhere offer a witness of care and love for our neighbours, to the point of exhaustion and not infrequently at the expense of their own health. Our gratitude and affection go to them, to all who work diligently to guarantee

the essential services necessary for civil society, and to the law enforcement and military personnel who in many countries have helped ease people's difficulties and sufferings.

In these weeks, the lives of millions of people have suddenly changed. For many, remaining at home has been an opportunity to reflect, to withdraw from the frenetic pace of life, stay with loved ones and enjoy their company. For many, though, this is also a time of worry about an uncertain future, about jobs that are at risk and about other consequences of the current crisis. I encourage political leaders to work actively for the common good, to provide the means and resources needed to enable everyone to lead a dignified life and, when circumstances allow, to assist them in resuming their normal daily activities.

This is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic. May the risen Jesus grant hope to all the poor, to those living on the peripheries, to refugees and the homeless. May these, the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters living in the cities and peripheries of every part of the world, not be abandoned. Let us ensure that they do not lack basic necessities (all the more difficult to find now that many businesses are closed) such as medicine and especially the possibility of adequate health care. In light of the present circumstances, may international sanctions be relaxed, since these make it difficult for countries on which they have been imposed to provide adequate support to their citizens, and may all nations be put in a position to meet the greatest needs of the moment through the reduction, if not the forgiveness, of

the debt burdening the balance sheets of the poorest nations.

This is not a time for self-centredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons. Among the many areas of the world affected by the coronavirus, I think in a special way of Europe. After the Second World War, this continent was able to rise again, thanks to a concrete spirit of solidarity that enabled it to overcome the rivalries of the past. It is more urgent than ever, especially in the present circumstances, that these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another. The European Union is presently facing an epochal challenge, on which will depend not only its future but that of the whole world. Let us not lose the opportunity to give further proof of

solidarity, also by turning to innovative solutions. The only alternative is the selfishness of particular interests and the temptation of a return to the past, at the risk of severely damaging the peaceful coexistence and development of future generations.

This is not a time for division. May Christ our peace enlighten all who have responsibility in conflicts, that they may have the courage to support the appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. This is not a time for continuing to manufacture and deal in arms, spending vast amounts of money that ought to be used to care for others and save lives. Rather, may this be a time for finally ending the long war that has caused such great bloodshed in beloved Syria, the conflict in Yemen and the hostilities in Iraq and in Lebanon. May this be the time when Israelis and

Palestinians resume dialogue in order to find a stable and lasting solution that will allow both to live in peace. May the sufferings of the people who live in the eastern regions of Ukraine come to an end. May the terrorist attacks carried out against so many innocent people in different African countries come to an end.

This is not a time for forgetfulness. The crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other crises that bring suffering to so many people. May the Lord of life be close to all those in Asia and Africa who are experiencing grave humanitarian crises, as in the Province of Cabo Delgado in the north of Mozambique. May he warm the hearts of the many refugees displaced because of wars, drought and famine. May he grant protection to migrants and refugees, many of them children, who are living in

unbearable conditions, especially in Libya and on the border between Greece and Turkey. And I do not want to forget the island of Lesbos. In Venezuela, may he enable concrete and immediate solutions to be reached that can permit international assistance to a population suffering from the grave political, socio-economic and health situation.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Indifference, self-centredness, division and forgetfulness are not words we want to hear at this time. We want to ban these words for ever! They seem to prevail when fear and death overwhelm us, that is, when we do not let the Lord Jesus triumph in our hearts and lives. May Christ, who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into

the light of his glorious day, a day that knows no end.

With these thoughts, I would like to wish all of you a happy Easter.

Easter Vigil - 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 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 today, 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, with a passing 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 our 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 my own Galilee. This is always the point from which we can set out anew, especially in times of crisis and trial. With the memory of my own 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.

Via Crucis in St. Peter's Square

**Good Friday Homily preached by
Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher
of the Papal Household**

St. Gregory the Great said that Scripture “grows with its readers”, *cum legentibus crescit*.^[1] It reveals

meanings always new according to the questions people have in their hearts as they read it. And this year we read the account of the Passion with a question—rather with a cry—in our hearts that is rising up over the whole earth. We need to seek the answer that the word of God gives it.

The Gospel reading we have just listened to is the account of the objectively greatest evil committed on earth. We can look at it from two different angles: either from the front or from the back, that is, either from its causes or from its effects. If we stop at the historical causes of Christ's death, we get confused and everyone will be tempted to say, as Pilate did, "I am innocent of this man's blood" (Mt 27:24). The cross is better understood by its effects than by its causes. And what were the effects of Christ's death? Being justified through faith in him, being reconciled and at peace with God,

and being filled with the hope of eternal life! (see Rom 5:1-5).

But there is one effect that the current situation can help us to grasp in particular. The cross of Christ has changed the meaning of pain and human suffering—of every kind of suffering, physical and moral. It is no longer punishment, a curse. It was redeemed at its root when the Son of God took it upon himself. What is the surest proof that the drink someone offers you is not poisoned? It is if that person drinks from the same cup before you do. This is what God has done: on the cross he drank, in front of the whole world, the cup of pain down to its dregs. This is how he showed us it is not poisoned, but that there is a pearl at the bottom of it.

And not only the pain of those who have faith, but of every human pain. He died for all human beings: “And when I am lifted up from the earth,”

he said, “I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:32). Everyone, not just some! St. John Paul II wrote from his hospital bed after his attempted assassination, “To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ.”[2] Thanks to the cross of Christ, suffering has also become in its own way a kind of “universal sacrament of salvation” for the human race.

What light does all of this shed on the dramatic situation that humanity is going through now? Here too we need to look at the effects more than at the causes—not just the negative ones we hear about every day in heart-wrenching reports but also the positive ones that only a more careful observation can help us grasp.

The pandemic of Coronavirus has abruptly roused us from the greatest danger individuals and humanity have always been susceptible to: the delusion of omnipotence. A Jewish rabbi has written that we have the opportunity to celebrate a very special paschal exodus this year, that “from the exile of consciousness” [3]. It took merely the smallest and most formless element of nature, a virus, to remind us that we are mortal, that military power and technology are not sufficient to save us. As a psalm in the Bible says, “In his prime, man does not understand. / He is like the beasts—they perish” (Ps 49:21). How true that is!

While he was painting frescoes in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the artist James Thornhill became so excited at a certain point about his fresco that he stepped back to see it better and was unaware he was about to fall over the edge of the scaffolding. A

horrified assistant understood that crying out to him would have only hastened the disaster. Without thinking twice, he dipped a brush in paint and hurled it at the middle of the fresco. The master, appalled, sprang forward. His work was damaged, but he was saved.

God does this with us sometimes: he disrupts our projects and our calm to save us from the abyss we don't see. But we need to be careful not to be deceived. God is not the one who hurled the brush at the sparkling fresco of our technological society. God is our ally, not the ally of the virus! He himself says in the Bible, "I have . . . plans for your welfare and not for woe" (Jer 29:11). If these scourges were punishments of God, it would not be explained why they strike equally good and bad, and why the poor usually bear the worst consequences of them. Are they more sinners than others?

The one who cried one day for Lazarus' death cries today for the scourge that has fallen on humanity. Yes, God "suffers", like every father and every mother. When we will find out this one day, we will be ashamed of all the accusations we made against him in life. God participates in our pain to overcome it. "Being supremely good - wrote St. Augustine - God would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, he is able to bring forth good out of evil." [4]

Did God the Father possibly desire the death of his Son in order to draw good out of it? No, he simply permitted human freedom to take its course, making it serve, however, his own purposes and not those of human beings. This is also the case for natural disasters like earthquakes and plagues. He does not bring them about. He has given nature a kind of freedom as well, qualitatively

different of course than that of human beings, but still a form of freedom—freedom to evolve according to its own laws of development. He did not create a world as a programmed clock whose least little movement could be anticipated. It is what some call “chance” but the Bible calls instead “the wisdom of God.”

The other positive fruit of the present health crisis is the feeling of solidarity. When, in the memory of humanity, have the people of all nations ever felt themselves so united, so equal, so less in conflict than at this moment of pain? Never so much as now have we experienced the truth of the words of one of our great poets: “Peace, you peoples! Too deep is the mystery of the prostrate earth.”[5] We have forgotten about building walls. The

virus knows no borders. In an instant it has broken down all the barriers and distinctions of race, nation, religion, wealth, and power. We should not revert to that prior time when this moment has passed. As the Holy Father has exhorted us, we should not waste this opportunity. Let us not allow so much pain, so many deaths, and so much heroic engagement on the part of health workers to have been in vain. Returning to the way things were is the “recession” we should fear the most.

*They shall beat their swords into
plowshares*

and their spears into pruning hooks;

*One nation shall not raise the sword
against another,*

*nor shall they train for war again. (Is
2:4)*

This is the moment to put into practice something of the prophecy of Isaiah whose fulfillment humanity has long been waiting for. Let us say “Enough!” to the tragic race toward arms. Say it with all your might, you young people, because it is above all your destiny that is at stake. Let us devote the unlimited resources committed to weapons to the goals that we now realize are most necessary and urgent: health, hygiene, food, the fight against poverty, stewardship of creation. Let us leave to the next generation a world poorer in goods and money, if need be, but richer in its humanity.

The word of God tells us the first thing we should do at times like these is to cry out to God. He himself is the one who puts on people's lips the words to cry out to him, at times harsh words of lament and almost of

accusation: “Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? / Rise up! Do not reject us forever! . . . Rise up, help us! / Redeem us in your mercy” (Ps 44, 24, 27). “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4:38).

Does God perhaps like to be petitioned so that he can grant his benefits? Can our prayer perhaps make God change his plans? No, but there are things that God has decided to grant us as the fruit both of his grace and of our prayer, almost as though sharing with his creatures the credit for the benefit received.[6] God is the one who prompts us to do it: “Seek and you will find,” Jesus said; “knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).

When the Israelites were bitten by poisonous serpents in the desert, God commanded Moses to lift up a serpent of bronze on a pole, and whoever looked at it would not die.

Jesus appropriated this symbol to himself when he told Nicodemus, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15). We too at this moment have been bitten by an invisible, poisonous "serpent." Let us gaze upon the one who was "lifted up" for us on the cross. Let us adore him on behalf of ourselves and of the whole human race. The one who looks on him with faith does not die. And if that person dies, it will be to enter eternal life.

"After three days I will rise", Jesus had foretold (cf. Mt 27:63). We too, after these days that we hope will be short, shall rise and come out of the tombs of our homes. Not however to return to the former life like Lazarus, but to a new life, like Jesus. A more fraternal, more human, more Christian life!

Translated from Italian by Marsha Daigle-Williamson

[1] *Moralia in Job*, XX, 1.

[2] John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris* [*On the Meaning of Human Suffering*], n. 23.

[3] <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/coronavirus-a-spiritual-message-from-brooklyn> (Yaakov Yitzhak Biderman).

[4] See St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* 11, 3; PL 40, 236.

[5] Giovanni Pascoli, “I due fanciulli” [“The Two Children”].

[6] See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, II-IIae, q. 83, a. 2.

Holy Thursday - Homily

The Eucharist. Service. Anointing. The reality we live today in this liturgy is the Lord who wants to remain with us in the Eucharist. And we always become tabernacles of the Lord. We bear the Lord with us to the point that He Himself tells us that if we do not eat His body and drink His blood, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the mystery of the bread and wine of the Lord with us, in us, within us.

Service. That gesture that is a condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Serve, yes, everyone, but the Lord -- in that exchange of words He had with Peter -- makes him understand that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, we must let the Lord serve us, that the Servant of God is the servant of us. And this is difficult to understand. If I do not let the Lord be my servant, allow the Lord to wash me, to help me grow, to

forgive me, I will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And the priesthood. Today I would like to be close to priests. All of them -- from the most recently ordained to the Pope, we are all priests. All the bishops... We are anointed, anointed by the Lord; anointed to offer the Eucharist, anointed to serve.

Today we did not have the Chrism Mass. I hope we will be able to have it before Pentecost, otherwise we will have to postpone it until next year. But I cannot let this Mass pass without mentioning priests. Priests who offer their lives for the Lord, priests who are servants. In recent days, more than 60 have died here in Italy, in the care of the sick in hospitals, and also with doctors, nurses ... They are "the saints next door," priests who gave their lives by serving.

And I think of those who are far away. Today I received a letter from a priest, chaplain from a distant prison, in which he tells of how he lives this Holy Week with prisoners. A Franciscan.

Priests who go far to bring the Gospel and die there. A bishop said that the first thing he did, when he arrived in these mission posts, was to go to the cemetery, to the grave of the priests who lost their lives there, young, due to a local plague [local diseases]. They were not prepared, they had no antibodies. No one knows their names. Anonymous priests.

The country parish priests, who are parish priests of four, five, or seven villages in the mountains and go from one to the other, who know the people... Once, one told me that he knew the name of every person in those villages. "Really?" I said to him. And he said to me: "Even the names

of their dogs." They know everyone. Priestly closeness.

Well done, good priests. Today I carry you in my heart and I bring you to the altar.

Slandered priests. Many times it happens today. They cannot go out on the street because bad things are said of them, in reference to the drama we have experienced with the discovery of priests who did ugly things. Some told me that they cannot leave the house with the clergyman because they are insulted, and they keep going.

Sinful priests, who together with the bishops and the Pope, a sinner, do not forget to ask for forgiveness. And learn to forgive because they know that they need to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. We are all sinners. Priests who suffer from crises, who do not know what to do, who are in

the dark... Today all of you, brother priests, are with me on the altar.

You who are consecrated, I only tell you one thing: Do not be stubborn, like Peter. Allow your feet to be washed. The Lord is your servant. He is close to you to give you strength, to wash your feet.

And so, with this awareness of the need to be washed, to be great forgivers. Forgive. A great heart has generosity in forgiveness. It is the measure by which we will be measured. As you have forgiven, you will be forgiven: the same measure. Do not be afraid to forgive.

Sometimes there are doubts ... Look at Christ [look at the Crucifix]. There is everyone's forgiveness.

Be brave, also in taking risks, in forgiving in order to console. And if you cannot give sacramental forgiveness at that moment, at least give the consolation of a brother who

accompanies and leaves the door open for [that person] to return.

I thank God for the grace of the priesthood. We all [thank you]. I thank God for you, priests. Jesus loves you! He only asks that you allow Him to wash your feet.

Palm Sunday - 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 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 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 betrayed! 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 most excruciating question “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: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*

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, 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 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, the fullest measure of God's love for us, and before the God who serves us to the point of giving his life, and 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 lifegiving 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. As Jesus did for us.

Text of Pope's Video Message for Holy Week

Dear friends, good evening!

This evening I have the chance to enter your homes in a different way

than usual. If you allow me, I would like to have a conversation with you for a few moments, in this time of difficulty and of suffering.

I can imagine you in your families, living an unusual life to avoid contagion. I am thinking of the liveliness of children and young people, who cannot go out, attend school, live their lives. I have in my heart all the families, especially those who have a loved one who is sick or who have unfortunately experienced mourning due to the coronavirus or other causes. These days I often think about people who are alone, and for whom it is more difficult to face these moments. Above all I think of the elderly, who are very dear to me.

I cannot forget those who are sick with coronavirus, people who are in hospital. I am aware of the generosity of those who put themselves at risk for the treatment

of this pandemic or to guarantee the essential services to society. So many heroes, every day, at every hour! I also remember how many are in financial straits and are worried about work and the future. A thought also goes out to prison inmates, whose pain is compounded by fear of the epidemic, for themselves and their loved ones; I think of the homeless, who do not have a home to protect them.

It is a difficult time for everyone. For many, very difficult. The Pope knows this and, with these words, he wants to tell everyone of his closeness and affection. Let us try, if we can, to make the best use of this time: let us be generous; let us help those in need in our neighbourhood; let us look out for the loneliest people, perhaps by telephone or social networks; let us pray to the Lord for those who are in difficulty in Italy and in the world. Even if we are isolated, thought and

spirit can go far with the creativity of love. This is what we need today: the creativity of love. This is what is needed today: the creativity of love.

Celebrating Holy Week in an "Unusual" Way

We will celebrate Holy Week in a truly unusual way, which manifests and sums up the message of the Gospel, that of God's boundless love. And in the silence of our cities, the Easter Gospel will resound. The Apostle Paul says: "And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him Who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor 5:15). In the risen Jesus, life conquered death. This Paschal faith nourishes our hope. I would like to share it with you this evening. It is the hope of a better time, in which we can be better, finally freed from evil and from this pandemic. It is a hope:

hope does not disappoint; it is not an illusion, it is a hope.

Beside each other, in love and patience, we can prepare a better time in these days. Thank you for allowing me into your homes. Make a gesture of tenderness towards those who suffer, towards children, and towards the elderly. Tell them that the Pope is close and pray, that the Lord will soon deliver us all from evil. And you, pray for me. Have a good dinner. See you soon!

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