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Holy Week with Pope Francis

Words of Pope Francis during Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum in Rome.

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Easter Vigil Homily

Many writers have evoked the beauty of starlit nights. The nights of war, however, are riven by streams of light that portend death. On this night, brothers and sisters, let us allow the women of the Gospel to lead us by the hand, so that, with

them, we may glimpse the first rays of the dawn of God's life rising in the darkness of our world. As the shadows of night were dispelled before the quiet coming of the light, the women set out for the tomb, to anoint the body of Jesus. There they had a disconcerting experience. First, they discovered that the tomb was empty; then they saw two figures in dazzling garments who told them that Jesus was risen. Immediately they ran back to proclaim the news to the other disciples (cf. *Lk* 24:1-10). *They saw, they heard, they proclaimed.* With these three verbs, may we too enter into the passover of the Lord from death to life.

The women saw. The first proclamation of the resurrection was not a statement to be unpacked, but a sign to be contemplated. In a burial ground, near a grave, in a place where everything should be orderly and peaceful, the women "found the

stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they went in, they did not find the body” (vv. 2-3). Easter begins by upsetting our expectations. It comes with the gift of a hope that surprises and amazes us. Yet it is not easy to welcome that gift. At times – we must admit – this hope does not find a place in our hearts. Like the women in the Gospel, we are overtaken by questions and doubts, and our first reaction before the unexpected sign is one of fear: “They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground” (v. 5).

All too often we look at life and reality with downcast eyes; we fix our gaze only on this passing day, disenchanted by the future, concerned only with ourselves and our needs, settled into the prison of our apathy, even as we keep complaining that things will never change. In this way, we halt before the tomb of resignation and fatalism;

we bury the joy of living. Yet tonight the Lord wants to give us different eyes, alive with hope that fear, pain and death will not have the last word over us. Thanks to Jesus' paschal mystery, we can make the leap from nothingness to life. "Death will no longer be able to rob our life" (K. RAHNER), for that life is now completely and eternally embraced by the boundless love of God. True, death can fill us with dread; it can paralyze us. But the Lord is risen! Let us lift up our gaze, remove the veil of sadness and sorrow from our eyes, and open our hearts to the hope that God brings!

In the second place, *the women heard*. After they had seen the empty tomb, the two men in dazzling garments said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (vv. 5-6). We do well to listen to those words and to repeat them: *He is not*

here! Whenever we think we have understood everything there is to know about God, and can pigeonhole him in our own ideas and categories, let us repeat to ourselves: He is not *here!* Whenever we seek him only in times of trouble and moments of need, only to set him aside and forget about him in the rest of our daily life and decisions, let us repeat: He is not *here!* And whenever we think we can imprison him in our words and our customary ways of thinking and acting, and neglect to seek him in the darkest corners of life, where people weep, struggle, suffer and hope, let us repeat: He is not *here!*

May we too hear the question asked of the women: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” We cannot celebrate Easter if we continue to be dead; if we remain prisoners of the past; if in our lives we lack the courage to let ourselves be forgiven by God who forgives

everything; if we fail to change, to break with the works of evil, to decide for Jesus and his love. If we continue to reduce faith to a talisman, making God a lovely memory from times past, instead of encountering him today as the living God who desires to change us and to change our world. A Christianity that seeks the Lord among the ruins of the past and encloses him in the tomb of habit is a *Christianity without Easter*. Yet the Lord is risen! Let us not tarry among the tombs, but run to find him, the Living One! Nor may we be afraid to seek him also in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the stories of those who hope and dream, in the pain of those who we suffer: God is there!

Finally, *the women proclaimed*. What did they proclaim? The joy of the resurrection. Easter did not occur simply to console those who mourned the death of Jesus, but to

open hearts to the extraordinary message of God's triumph over evil and death. The light of the resurrection was not meant to let the women bask in a transport of joy, but to generate missionary disciples who "return from the tomb" (v. 9) in order to bring to all the Gospel of the risen Christ. That is why, after seeing and hearing, the women ran to proclaim to the disciples the joy of the resurrection. They knew that the others might think they were mad; indeed, the Gospel says that the women's words "seemed to them an idle tale" (v. 11). Yet those women were not concerned for their reputation, for preserving their image; they did not contain their emotions or measure their words. Their hearts were enflamed only with the desire to convey the news, the proclamation: "The Lord is risen!".

How beautiful is a Church that can run this way through the streets of our world! Without fear, without schemes and stratagems, but solely with the desire to lead everyone to the joy of the Gospel. That is what we are called to do: to experience the risen Christ and to share the experience with others; to roll away the stone from the tomb where we may have enclosed the Lord, in order to spread his joy in the world. Let us make Jesus, the Living One, rise again from all those tombs in which we have sealed him. Let us set him free from the narrow cells in which we have so often imprisoned him. Let us awaken from our peaceful slumber and let him disturb and inconvenience us. Let us bring him into our everyday lives: through gestures of peace in these days marked by the horrors of war, through acts of reconciliation amid broken relationships, acts of compassion towards those in need,

acts of justice amid situations of inequality and of truth in the midst of lies. And above all, through works of love and fraternity.

Brothers and sisters our hope has a name: the name of Jesus. He entered the tomb of our sin; he descended to those depths where we feel most lost; he wove his way through the tangles of our fears, bore the weight of our burdens and from the dark abyss of death restored us to life and turned our mourning into joy. Let us celebrate Easter with Christ! He is alive! Today, too, he walks in our midst, changes us and sets us free. Thanks to him, evil has been robbed of its power; failure can no longer hold us back from starting anew; and death has become a passage to the stirrings of new life. For with Jesus, the Risen Lord, no night will last forever; and even in the darkest night, in that darkness, the morning star continues to shine.

In this darkness that you are experiencing, Mr Mayor and dear Parliamentarians, the thick darkness of war, of cruelty, all of us are praying, praying with you and for you this night. We are praying for all the suffering. We can give you only our fellowship and our prayer and say to you: “Courage! We accompany you!” And also to say to you the greatest thing we are celebrating today: *Christòs voskrés!* Christ is risen!

“HOPE UNDER SEIGE”

POPE FRANCIS IN CONVERSATION
WITH LORENA BIANCHETTI

(Good Friday Special)

Lorena Bianchetti: Your Holiness, first of all, thank you for being here. I am here on behalf of all the people

who, at this time, are experiencing complex states of soul: bewilderment, anguish, fear, suffering. I'll begin with a time: three, three in the afternoon. Jesus dies on the cross, and dies an innocent man. There are many people who do not want war, but who are suffering from it. These days, there are images of lifeless bodies on the street, there is even talk of mobile crematoria, and even of rape, devastation, barbarity.

What is happening to humanity, Your Holiness?

Holy Father: But this is not new. One writer said that "*Jesus Christ is in agony until the end of the world*". He is in agony in his children, in his brothers and sisters, above all in the poor, in the marginalized, in the poor people who cannot defend themselves. At this moment in Europe, this war is really affecting

us. But let's look a little further. The world is at war, the world is at war! Syria, Yemen, then think of the Rohingya people driven out, without a homeland. War is everywhere. The genocide in Rwanda 25 years ago. Because the world has chosen – it's hard to say this – but the world has chosen the path of Cain and war is enacting what Cain did, that is, killing one's brother.

Lorena Bianchetti: And this is so because good exists and evil exists. You have often warned us about the way in which evil acts. You have told us that the devil presents himself in a good light, he flatters us. but in reality, evil wants only our defeat: do not dialogue with the devil. And so, I ask you, precisely in light of what you have said, how can forms of mediation be found, forms of dialogue with the person, or at any rate, with those persons, who want

and who pursue only the imposition of power?

Holy Father: When I say not to dialogue with the devil, it is because the devil is evil, lacking anything good! We say he's like absolute evil. He is the one who rebelled totally against God! But with those people who are sick, who have this disease of hatred, you speak, you dialogue, and Jesus conversed with many sinners, even with Judas up to the end as "friend", always with tenderness because all of us always have, with the Lord's spirit, something good that He embedded within us. And when I am in front of a person and I always – we all say this, we all say it differently – when we are in front of a person, we have to think about what to this person: to the evil part or to the hidden, more good, part. All of us want something good, everyone! This is truly the image of God in us. But we must

never give up on a person, no...who's ended up doing evil, and say, "*This person is condemned*". A woman comes to my mind who went to confession to the Cure of Ars because her husband had thrown himself off a bridge. The Cure listened to her, crying. "*What I am most upset about is that he is in hell*". "Stop", he told her. "*Between the bridge and the river is the mercy of God*". God always tries to save us even to the end, because he embedded something good in us. He placed it in Cain as well, Abel and Cain, but Cain did a violent deed; and war is carried out with this deed.

Lorena Bianchetti: But, what do you think, even from a cultural point of view, is there enough of a commitment – I am talking even about the ecclesial level, so not only cultural – is there enough of a commitment toward cautioning those people who are tempted to fall and to live with hell in their hearts

already on this earth? I am saying this to you because at times we live in a society in which it seems the diabolic is decisively more attractive, more stimulating than what is good, honest, kind, even spiritual, which appears and is presenting as being boring.

Holy Father: Yes, this is true. Evil is more seductive. Going back to the devil, someone says that I speak too much about the devil. But he is real. I believe in him, eh! Some say: “*No, he is a myth*”. I don’t go along with myths, I go along with reality, I believe it. But he is seductive. Seduction always tries to enter promising something. If sins were ugly, if they didn’t contain anything good, no one would sin. The devil presents something beautiful about the sin to you, and leads you to sin. For example, those who create war, those who destroy the lives of others, those who exploit people for work.

The other day I heard a family recounting that their father, still a young married man, had to work as an agricultural day labourer, who would leave early in the morning, and return in the evening, making very little, exploited by a company worth billions. This too is war. This too is destroying, it's not only tanks, this is destruction too. The devil is always after our destruction. Why? Because we are the image of God. Let's go back to the beginning, three in the afternoon. Jesus dies, dies alone. The most absolute solitude, abandoned even by God: "*Why have you abandoned me?*" The most absolute solitude, because he wanted to descend even into the worst depths of our solitude to pull us out of it. He returns to the Father, but first he descends, he is in every exploited person, those who suffer war, those who suffer destruction, those who suffer trafficking. How many women are slaves of

trafficking here in Rome and in the large cities. It is a work of evil. It is war.

Lorena Bianchetti: In short, as Dostoevsky said in *Brothers Karamazov*: “*God and devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man*”. That’s where the game’s played.

Holy Father: That’s where it’s played. This is why meekness is needed, that humility to say to God: “*I am a sinner, but you save me, help me!*” Because each one of us has within the possibility of doing what others are doing who are destroying people, who exploit people. For sin is possible due to our weakness and also due to our pride.

Lorena Bianchetti: Earlier you recalled the phrase Jesus said on the cross: “*My God, why have you abandoned me?*” And this phrase betrays solitude, but also distress,

anguish, and so, even desperation, the state of soul that all of us experience when we do not know what the solution to a suffering is, but even a sense of guilt. Regarding desperation, what comes to my mind, Your Holiness, is an image from this war – and I say it as a mother – a father running with his child in his arms because he had been hit by shrapnel. He and his wife are running to the hospital, desperate. The news that was reported is that this child, unfortunately, did not make it. I cannot imagine a desperation more heartbreaking than that of those two parents who lose a child in this way. What do you feel like saying to them? What do you want to say to those parents who live this heartbreaking experience?

Holy Father: You know, you learn in life. I have had to learn many things, and I still have to learn because I hope to live a little longer, but I need

to learn. And one of the things I have learned is not to speak when someone is suffering. Whether a sick person, or a tragedy. I take them by the hand, in silence. But when they come to you [to say], and you are sick, “*No, but she here or there, but the Lord...*”. Keep quite! Keep quiet! In the presence of suffering: silence. And weeping. It is true that weeping is a gift of God, it is a gift we need to ask for: the grace to weep, before our weaknesses, before the weaknesses and tragedies of the world. But there are no words. You cited Dostoevsky. What comes to me [my mind] is that little booklet that is like a summary of all of his philosophy, his theology, everything: *Notes from Underground*. And in there it says that someone was dying, a person died – they were convicts, prisoners who were in hospital – someone died there and they would pick them up and take them away. And someone else from another bed, says: “*Please, stop! Even*

he had a mother". The image of the woman, the image of the mother before the cross. This is a message, it is a message from Jesus for us, it is the message of the tenderness in a mother. In the worst moment of his life, Jesus did not insult.

Lorena Bianchetti: Since you have brought up women, Your Holiness, there were indeed women under the cross. There is another image I would like to bring up. Let's go back again to Ukraine. A pregnant woman, being transported on a stretcher because she was wounded in the war, transported in the midst of the rubble, while trying to caress her womb with the last ounce of strength she has left. From what was reported, not even this woman with child made it. Truly, the women, the strength of women, comes to my mind. Russian mothers come to my mind, Ukrainian mothers come to my mind. And so, regarding the role of

women, I ask you: how important is the active role of women around the negotiating table, to construct peace concretely?

Holy Father: There is an expression, *“Women are capable of giving life even to a dead person”*. Women are at the crossroads of the greatest fatalities, they are there, they are strong. This is interesting. Jesus is the bridegroom of the Church, and the Church is a woman. This is why mother Church is so strong. I am not referring to clericalism, to the Church’s sins. No. Mother Church means the one who, at the foot of the cross, sustains us sinners. One thing that touches me a lot, and makes me think of Mary and the other women at the foot of the cross. Sometimes I had to go to some parish in an area in Buenos Aires called *Villa Devoto*. I would take the bus, the 86. It would pass in front of a prison, and many times I would go by and there was a

line of the prisoners' mothers there. They let their faces be seen for their children, because everyone who passed by would say: "*These are the mothers of the ones inside*". And they tolerated the most shameful security checks, all to see their child. The strength of a woman, of a mother, that is capable of accompanying their children even to the end. And this is Mary and the women at the foot of the cross. And to accompany a child, knowing that many people say: "*But this woman, how did she bring up a child who ended up this way?*" Instant gossip. But women do not let it bother them: when a child is at stake, when life is at stake, women continue on. This is why what you are saying – to give woman a role in difficult moments, in tragic moments – is so important, so important. They know what life is, what it is to prepare for life and to prepare for death, they know well. They speak that language.

Lorena Bianchetti: And there are, Your Holiness – because we are also talking about many deaths caused by the war – there are more silent deaths that are no less cruel. I am thinking of those killed by the mafia, and I am thinking of the women killed by their own companions. It is true that the last will be first in Heaven, but these people and those who lose their loved ones, how can they believe in justice, in some form of recompense even in this world?

Holy Father: The exploitation of women is our daily bread. Violence against women is our daily bread. Women who endure beatings, who suffer the violence of their companions and bear this in silence, or who leave without saying why. We men are always right: we are perfect. And women are condemned to keep silence by society. *“No, but she’s crazy, she’s a sinner”*. What they said about the Magdalene. *“But look at*

her, at what she's done. She's a sinner!" "And you aren't a sinner? You don't make mistakes?" But women are humanity's reserves. I am convinced of this. Women are the strength. And there, at the foot of the cross, the disciples fled, the women no, the women who had followed him their whole life. And Jesus, on his way toward Calvary, stops in front of a group of women who were weeping. They are able to weep, we men are more coarse. And he stops [and says]: *"Weep for your children"* because a lot will be done against them.

Lorena Bianchetti: And at this time, Your Holiness, I think of those fleeing: there are these images that show the flight of Ukrainian people who are forced to leave their land, their homes, their loved ones. It is one of the latest exoduses that we are probably, alas, becoming accustomed to. But in this case, there has been a

real concrete response. Does this response, I ask you, do you think it means there are cracks in the walls of indifference, of prejudice toward those who flee from other parts of the world wounded by war, or will refugees continue to be subdivided into the category of being an annoyance?

Holy Father: It is true. Refugees are subdivided. There's first class, second class, skin colour, [if] they come from a developed country [or] one that is not developed. We are racists, we are racists. And this is bad. The problem of the refugees is a problem that Jesus suffered too, because he was a migrant and a refugee in Egypt when he was a child, to escape death. How many of them are suffering to escape death! There is an image of the flight into Egypt that a Piedmont artist executed. He sent it to me and I made holy cards from it. It shows Joseph with the baby who are fleeing. But

Saint Joseph does not have a beard, no. He is Syrian, from today, with a baby, who is fleeing the war today. An anguished face that these people have, just like Jesus, forced to flee. And Jesus went through all these things, he is still there. On the cross, there are people from the countries of Africa at war, of the Middle East at war, of Latin America at war, of Asia at war. Several years ago I said that we are living a third world war in pieces. But we have not learned. I – I am a minister of the Lord and a sinner, chosen by the Lord, but a sinner nevertheless – when I went to Redipuglia in 2014 for the commemoration of the centenary, I saw and I wept. All I could do was weep. All the young men, all the boys. Then one day, I went to the cemetery in Anzio, and I saw those young men who landed in Anzio. All young! And I wept there yet again. I am moved to tears before this. I think it was two years ago when

there was the commemoration of the landing in Normandy. I saw the government leaders, there was a reunion...they commemorated this. But why don't we all commemorate the 30,000 soldiers who fell on Normandy's beaches? War is growing with the lives of our children, of our young people. This is why I am saying that war is a monstrosity! Let us go to these cemeteries, which are the very life of this memory. Let's think about that scene that is written: ships arriving on Normandy, opening, young boys jumping down with their rifles and the Germans... (*editor's note: the Holy Father imitates the action of shooting*). 30,000 on the beach.

Lorena Bianchetti: And so this brings me to the arms race, to this topic. A topic you have confronted many times, which, perhaps, has not always been given due emphasis. Why have you said that, in recent

times, more has been invested in arms instead of in education or in formation. Why haven't human beings learned from the past and continue to use weapons to resolve their problems?

Holy Father: I understand those governments that buy arms, I understand them. I do not justify them, but I understand them. Because we have to defend ourselves, because [this is] the Cainist pattern of war. If there were a pattern of peace, this would not be necessary. But we live with this diabolic pattern of killing one another out of the desire for power, the desire for security, the desire for many things. But I think of the hidden wars, those no one sees, that are far away from us. Many. Why? To exploit? We have forgotten the language of peace – we have forgotten it. We speak about peace. The United Nations has done

everything possible, but they have not succeeded. I go back to Calvary. There, Jesus did everything. With mercy, with goodness, he tried to convince the leaders, but no: war, war, war against him! To oppose meekness with war for the sake of security: “*It is better that one man die for the people*”, the high priest says, because if not, the Romans will come. And war.

Lorena Bianchetti: So, to connect with what you were saying, we were speaking before about the women under the cross, regarding the men who have power – at that time there was Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas. All these people could have saved an innocent man but did not do: they preferred not to face the risk for truth. They have died, but their *modus operandi* continues to be relevant today. Why didn't they have the courage to choose that good, to even defend the

Man who had simply asked that we love one another?

Holy Father: In the Gospel, there is a woman about whom not much is said – she is spoken of a bit *en passant* – she is Pilate's wife. She understood something. She says to her husband: "*Have nothing to do with that righteous man*". But Pilate doesn't listen to her, "*it's a woman's thing*". But this woman without power in the Gospel, who comes up unexpectedly, understood the tragedy for what it was from afar. Why? Perhaps because she was a mother, she possessed women's intuition. "*Be careful that they don't deceive you*". Who? Power. That power that between Sunday and Friday was capable of changing the people's opinion. The *Hosanna* on Sunday became the *Crucify him!* on Friday. And this is our daily bread. It takes women to sound the alarm.

Lorena Bianchetti: And so, Your Holiness, Jesus on the cross, after the phrase, “*My God, why have you abandoned me?*” We were speaking about desperation, about distress, and about solitude too: Good Friday is the day of solitude. And solitude makes me inevitably think about what each one of us experienced at the height of the pandemic. I think of the elderly, I think of the young people, I think of the people who went through the ordeal of the illness, and of those who had to use a helmet because they couldn’t breathe. And I think of you, Your Holiness, on that 27 March 2020. What were you thinking at that moment when you crossed Saint Peter’s Square, completely empty, drenched with the rain, as you approached the basilica’s steps?

Holy Father: I don’t know that I was thinking. Feeling, yes. I was trying to feel the tragedy of that moment, of so

many people. But you underlined the solitude, the suffering of that time, of the elderly. It's interesting: they are the ones who always foot the bill. And the young people too, because we rob the young ones of hope. We force them to take the path of the *Turandot*: "*the hope that always disappoints*". No, hope never disappoints! But it is the young and the elderly who have the possibility of reacting in their hands and in their hearts: this is why I insist so much that young people and the elderly dialogue. The wisdom of the elderly, but with the solitude that they have suffered. The wisdom of the elderly, so often neglected and left aside in a rest home. I used to like going to rest homes in Buenos Aires, there were many in a big city. I asked one woman: "*How are you? How many children do you have? Oh, four? And do they come?*" "*Sì...no, they leave me alone*". The nurse was listening, and on the way out:

“Father, no one has come for six months”. The abandonment of the elderly is the abandonment of wisdom, because we are supermen sometimes, we know everything. We know nothing! The solitude of the elderly and the use of the young people, because young people will turn out badly, without the wisdom that comes from a people. Jesus had all this in his heart at that moment: we were all there. You recalled that *Statio Orbis* of March, two years ago, and you were feeling all of this. But I didn’t know that the square would be empty, I didn’t know that. I arrived and nobody [was there]. Sure, I knew that because of the rain there would only be a few people, but nobody. It was a message from the Lord to understand solitude well. The solitude of the elderly, the solitude of the young people whom we leave alone. *“Let them be free”*. No! They are slaves alone. Accompany them! This is why it is important that they

take the inheritance of the elderly, their unpaid debt. The solitude of young people, of the elderly. The solitude of the people who are mentally ill in health care facilities. The solitude of those people who are going through a personal, family tragedy. The solitude of a woman battered by her husband, but [who], to save the family, keeps quiet. There are many types of solitude we experience. You have your own as well. I have mine; certainly, you have yours. Small solitudes, but they are there, in those small solitudes we can understand Jesus' solitude, the solitude of the cross.

Lorena Bianchetti: Have you ever felt alone in carrying out your ministry?

Holy Father: No, God has been good to me. I don't know. If there is something bad, he has always put someone there to help me! He has

been present. He has been very generous. Perhaps because he knows that I wouldn't be able to make it alone! (*Editor's note: he laughs*).

Lorena Bianchetti: But you know, that 27 March – I think I really speak for everyone – you took us in your arms, you gave us so much strength that day. Because of that, each one of us became aware, and, in some way, I believe we began again. Another question because, as we said, Jesus was scourged, humiliated, crowned with thorns, crucified. And in some way, all of this came upon him a little bit from within his family, since it was Judas who betrayed him, and Peter denied him. In short: the deadly blows were dealt precisely by those close to him. So, what are the wounds that the Church continues to inflict today on the Crucified One?

Holy Father: I speak clearly about this because I am convinced about

this. The hardest cross that the Church inflicts on the Lord today is worldliness, a worldly spirit. The worldly spirit that is partly the spirit of power, but not only of power, it is living according to the style of the world that – it's interesting – is fed by and grows with money. This is something interesting. In the devil's three temptations of Jesus, the devil proposes worldly things. The first, fame, that's understood: this is human – but then? Power, vanity: worldly things. Because the worldliness is attractive, and the Church, when it falls into worldliness, into the worldly spirit, the Church is defeated. It is the spirit of worldliness that causes the worst harm today, but it has always been this way. When Jesus tells us: *"Please, make a clear choice, you cannot serve two masters. Either serve God"* – and I would expect him to say "or serve the devil" – but it doesn't say this. *"Either serve God or serve money"*.

Use money to do good, to support your family with work done well. But to serve! And worldliness, we could stay a long time on this.

Lorena Bianchetti: I read that Leo XIII had a prayer against the devil introduced at the end of Mass, because he said that there was the risk that the devil could infiltrate the Church even through the cracks in the doors. What do you think, then, about this crack through which the devil has succeeded in entering the Church today?

Holy Father: Worldliness – but this has always been so. [In] every age, worldliness changes its name, but it is [always] worldliness. Every day, I pray that prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel in the morning. Every day! So that it might help me conquer the devil. Someone who hears me might say: *“But, Your Holiness, you have studied, you are*

the Pope and you still believe in the devil?" Yes, I believe in him, I believe in him. I am afraid of him, this is why I have to defend myself so much. The devil was the one who did all that manoeuvring so that Jesus would end up like he did, on the cross. The powers of darkness over Jesus: *"This is your hour"*, the powers of darkness.

Lorena Bianchetti: And so, Your Holiness, going back to the war in Ukraine. Kyiv – we are seeing it, the images are arriving – it's completely destroyed. In ashes. Perhaps this is the very scene that the devil likes so much. So, I ask you: Kyiv is no longer simply a geographic place, but it represents much more to the eyes of the world. In your heart, what does it represent?

Holy Father: Pain. Pain is uncertainty, it's a feeling that takes over. After surgery, when you feel

the physical pain from the wound they've given you, you ask for anaesthesia, for something to help you tolerate it. But [for] human pain, moral pain, there is no anaesthesia. Only prayer and tears. I am convinced that we are not weeping very well today. We have forgotten how to weep. If I may give some advice, to me and to the people, it is to ask for the gift of tears. And to weep like Peter wept after having betrayed Jesus. When he ran off, he wept when he denied him. He wept. A type of weeping that is not an outburst, no. It is physically-felt shame and, I believe we are lacking this shame. There are many of us who do not feel shame many times – there is an insult used in my homeland “*[that person] has no shame*” – but the grace of weeping. There is a beautiful prayer, there is a beautiful Mass that asks for the gift of tears. In that Mass, a beautiful prayer goes like this: “*Lord, you who*

made water flow from the rock, grant that tears might flow from the rock of my heart". The hard heart, the heart that is not moved, does not know how to weep. I ask myself: how many people can weep on seeing the images of war, whatever war? Some yes, I am sure, but many are not able to. They begin to justify or attack. No, this (*Editor's note: the Holy Father points to his heart*): you need to cure this. And Jesus touches here. Today, Good Friday, in front of Jesus Crucified, let him touch your heart, let him speak to you with his silence, and with his pain. He speaks to you through those people who are suffering in the world: who suffer from hunger, suffer from war, suffer from such exploitation, and all these things. Let Jesus speak to you and, please, don't speak. Remain silent. Let him be the one, and ask for the grace of tears.

Lorena Bianchetti: How much religions can do to remove this desertification from hearts. What can and what words do you want to say, even to the Orthodox bishops?

Holy Father: Yes, they too are preparing for Easter with us, with the difference of a week, because they follow – even Eastern Catholics – follow the Julian calendar, not the Gregorian. I take the opportunity to send a message of fraternity to all my brother Orthodox bishops who are living this Easter with the same pain that I and many Catholics are living ours. It is not easy to be a bishop... and thank God that it's not easy! This is why I don't understand those who want to become a bishop! They don't know what's in store for them! But I take the opportunity to greet all the Orthodox bishops, as a brother in the faith.

Lorena Bianchetti: There is another statement that Jesus utters on the cross: *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”*. Forgiveness. You have said that to turn the other cheek does not mean to suffer in silence, to succumb to injustice. Even Jesus, you reminded us, denounced injustice, and you specified that he did so without anger or violence, but rather with tenderness. Your Holiness, how can one be kind or forgive all those people who do us harm, those people who kill the innocent, those people who not only cause physical, but also cause psychological, harm?

Holy Father: I will give you my prescription. If I have not done that evil, it is because He has stayed me with His hand, with His mercy. Otherwise, I am sure I would have done so many [things] like the others, so much evil. Regarding this, I can say that I am a witness to the mercy

of God. This is why I cannot condemn someone who comes to ask for forgiveness. I must always forgive. Every one of us can say this about him or herself regarding their own personal program (*Editor's note: examination of conscience*). It is true that I may not perhaps succeed affectively: *"Come here, dear, and give me a kiss"*. No, perhaps I am angry! But I can say: *"Lord, take this anger from me. I forgive, even though I do not feel like forgiving. I forgive. You take care of things so that this forgiveness can be given..."*.

Lorena Bianchetti: The roots of forgiveness are solely divine.

Holy Father: Yes, in the end, forgiveness is this type of thing.

Lorena Bianchetti: Thinking again about solitude, returning to Jesus on the cross, I am thinking of all those people who lost their jobs in the wake of Covid. There are many of

them, Your Holiness, who are experiencing this type of difficulty. What words of hope do you want to give them?

Holy Father: The key word you just used is hope. Hope is not caressing someone and saying: *“Ah, everything passes, don’t worry”*. Hope is a tension toward the future, toward Heaven as well. This is why the image of hope is an anchor: the anchor thrown over there and I have the cord there, to arrive there, to resolve the situation, but always with that cord. Hope never disappoints, but it makes you wait. Hope is the *housekeeper* of the Catholic life, of the Christian life. It is truly the humblest of virtues. It is hidden, but if you do not have it in your hand, you will not find the right path. It is hope that makes you find the right path. To have hope means not having illusions: *“I’ll go...[to] someone who will read my palms...that suits you*

well". No, this is not hope. Hope is the certainty that I have in my hands the cord of that anchor thrown over there. We like speaking about faith, a lot, about charity: Look at that! Hope is the virtue that is hidden a bit, the littlest, the littlest in the house. But it is the strongest for us.

Lorena Bianchetti: This too, then, is a message for the young, because, thinking of the young, the ones who see the future being somewhat snatched from their hands – you spoke about that very clearly. This is the reason why they don't plan much, why they don't always believe in permanent relationships, why they don't form families. In short, we can say that they aren't helped much even on the institutional and cultural levels. So, what would you like to say to them?

Holy Father: That they not confuse hope with optimism. We can buy

optimism at a kiosk. Did you know that optimism is for sale? But hope is something else. Hope is being certain that we are moving toward life.

There is an Argentinian poet – really good, a great poet – [there is] a phrase, a poem, that has always hit me, a definition of life: “*Life is death that is on the way*”. No, life is not death on the way: perhaps life is going from death to life! Hope is strong here: it is the cord of the anchor. It never disappoints! But it is humble, it is truly the *housekeeper* of the Christian life. How many times it is the *housekeepers* who keep the life of family going ahead.

Lorena Bianchetti: I am coming to the end, Your Holiness. Today is Good Friday, but the story of salvation does not end here. Fortunately, the Gospel has a happy ending because there is the resurrection of Jesus: that is the centre of the story of salvation. So, what is your hope for this Easter?

Holy Father: An internal joy. There is a Psalm that says: “*When the Lord delivered us from Babylon, it seemed like a dream*”. From weeping to joy. It is joy. My hope is that we not lose hope, but true hope – the one that does not disappoint – and that we ask for the grace of tears, but the tears of joy, the tears of consolation, the tears of hope. I am sure, I repeat, we must weep more. We have forgotten how to weep. Let us ask Peter to teach us how to weep like he did. And then, the silence of Good Friday.

Lorena Bianchetti: Your Holiness, it's almost three. How should we live this hour today?

Holy Father: (*Editor's note: he does not respond, he remains in silence*).

Lorena Bianchetti: May I give you a hug on behalf of everyone? Thank you, Your Holiness! Thank you.

Holy Father: Thank you. May the Lord bless you!

The Way of the Cross, led by Pope Francis on Good Friday, 15 April

General Audience, 13 April 2022:

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We are in the middle of Holy Week, which lasts from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Both these Sundays are characterized by the feast that takes place around Jesus. But they are two different feasts.

Last Sunday, we saw Christ solemnly entering Jerusalem, as though for a feast, welcomed as the Messiah:

cloaks (cf. *Lk* 19:36) and branches cut from trees (cf *Mt* 21:8) were laid before him on the ground. The exultant crowd loudly blesses “the King who comes”, and acclaims “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (*Lk* 19: 38). Those people there celebrate because they see Jesus’ entry as the arrival of a new king, who would bring peace and glory. That was the peace those people were waiting for: a glorious peace, the fruit of royal intervention, that of a powerful messiah who would have liberated Jerusalem from the Roman occupation. Others probably dreamed of the re-establishment of a social peace and saw Jesus as the ideal king, who would feed the crowd with bread, as he had done already, and would work great miracles, thus bringing more justice into the world.

But Jesus never speaks of this. He has a different Passover ahead of him,

not a triumphal Passover. The only thing that he is concerned about in the preparation of his entry into Jerusalem is to ride “a colt tied, on which no-one has ever yet sat” (v. 30). This is how Christ brings peace into the world: through meekness and mildness, symbolized by that tethered colt, on which no-one had ever sat. No-one, because God’s way of doing things is different to that of the world. Indeed, just before Passover, Jesus explains to the disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (*Jn 14:27*). They are two different approaches: the way the world gives us peace, and the way God gives us peace. They are different.

The peace Jesus gives to us at Easter is not the peace that follows the strategies of the world, which believes it can obtain it through force, by conquest and with various

forms of imposition. This peace, in reality, is only an interval between wars: we are well aware of this. The peace of the Lord follows the way of meekness and the cross: it is taking responsibility for others. Indeed, Christ took on himself our evil, sin and death. He took all of this upon himself. In this way he freed us. He paid for us. His peace is not the fruit of some compromise, but rather is born of self-giving. This meek and courageous peace, though, is difficult to accept. In fact, the crowd who exalted Jesus is the same that a few days later will shout, "Crucify him!" and, fearful and disappointed, will not lift a finger for him.

In this regard, a great story by Dostoevsky, the so-called *Legend of The Grand Inquisitor*, is always relevant. It tells of Jesus who, after several centuries, returns to Earth. He is immediately welcomed by the rejoicing crowd, which recognizes

and acclaims him. “Ah, you have returned! Come, come with us!”. But then he is arrested by the Inquisitor, who represents worldly logic. The latter interrogates him and criticizes him fiercely. The final reason for the rebuke is that Christ, although he could, never wanted to become Caesar, the greatest king of this world, preferring to leave humanity free rather than subjugate it and solve its problems by force. He could have established peace in the world, bending the free but precarious heart of man by force of a higher power, but he chose not to: he respected our freedom. “Hadst Thou taken the world and Caesar’s purple, Thou wouldst have founded the universal state and given universal peace” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Milan 2012, 345); and with a lashing sentence he concludes, “For it anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou” (348). Here is the deception that is repeated throughout history,

the temptation of a false peace, based on power, which then leads to hatred and betrayal of God, and much bitterness in the soul.

In the end, according to the story, the Inquisitor “longed for [Jesus] to say something, however bitter and terrible”. But Jesus reacts with a gentle and concrete gestures: “He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips” (352). Jesus’ peace does not overpower others; it is not an armed peace, never! The weapons of the Gospel are prayer, tenderness, forgiveness and freely-given love for one’s neighbour, love for every neighbour. This is how God’s peace is brought into the world. This is why the armed aggression of these days, like every war, represents an outrage against God, a blasphemous betrayal of the Lord of Passover, a preference for the face of the false god of this world

over his meek one. War is always a human act, to bring about the idolatry of power.

Before his final Passover, Jesus says to his disciples: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (*Jn* 14:27). Yes, because while worldly power leaves only destruction and death in its wake – we have seen this in recent days – his peace builds up history, starting from the heart of every person who welcomes us. Easter is therefore the true feast of God and humanity, because the peace that Christ gained on the cross in giving himself is distributed to us. Therefore, the Risen Christ, on Easter Day, appears to the disciples, and how does he greet them? “Peace be with you!” (*Jn* 20:19-21). This is the greeting of Christ victorious, the Risen Christ.

Brothers, sisters, Easter means “passage”. This year above all, it is a

blessed occasion to pass from the worldly god to the Christian God, from the greed that we carry within us to the charity that sets us free, from the expectation of a peace brought by force to the commitment to bear real witness to the peace of Jesus. Brothers and sisters, let us place ourselves before the Crucified One, the wellspring of our peace, and ask him for peace of heart and peace in the world

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