



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 5 April 2023

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Catechesis. "The Crucifix, well-spring of hope"

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last Sunday, the Liturgy had us listen to the Passion of the Lord. It ended with these words: "They sealed the stone" (cf. *Mt* 27:66). Everything seemed over. For Jesus' disciples, that boulder signified *the final end of their hope*. The Teacher was crucified, killed in the most cruel and humiliating way, hung upon the infamous gallows outside the city — a public failure, the worst possible ending. It was the worst at that time. Now for us today, there is nothing entirely strange regarding the discouragement that oppressed the disciples. Gloomy thoughts and feelings of frustration accumulate in us as well. Why is there so much indifference toward God? This is interesting: Why is there so much indifference toward God? Why is there so much evil in the world? Well, look, there is evil in the world! Why do inequalities continue to increase and why is that long-awaited peace not arriving? Why are we so attached to war, to treating each other badly? In each person's heart, how many expectations have faded; how many delusions there are! And again, there is that feeling that times gone by were better and that in the world, perhaps even in the Church, things are not going the way they once did.... In short, even today, hope sometimes seems to be sealed behind the stone of mistrust. And I invite each one of you to think about this: Where is your hope? Is your hope alive, or have you sealed it there, or do you keep it in a drawer, like a memory? Does your hope spur you to walk or is it a romantic memory, as if it were something that does not exist. Where is your hope today?

One image remained fixed in the minds of the disciples: *the cross*. That is where everything ended. That is where the end of everything was centred. But in a little while, they would discover a new beginning right there, in the cross. Dear brothers and sisters, this is how God's hope germinates. It is born and reborn in the black holes of our disappointed expectations — and hope, true hope, instead, never disappoints. Let us think precisely about the cross: out of the most terrible instrument of torture, God wrought the greatest sign of his love. Having become the tree of life, that wood of death reminds us that God's beginnings often begin with our endings. Thus, he loves to work wonders. So today, *let us look at the tree of the cross so that hope might germinate in us* — that everyday virtue, that silent, humble virtue, but also that virtue that keeps us on our feet, that helps us move forward. It is not possible to live without hope. Let us think: Where is my hope? Today, *let us look at the tree of the cross so that hope may germinate in us* ... that we may be healed of our sadness. And how many sad people there are! When I used to be able to go out to the streets — I cannot do it now because they do not allow me — but when I could go out to the streets in another diocese, I used to like watching people's faces. How many sad faces! Sad people, people talking to themselves, people walking alone with their phones, but without peace, without hope. And where is your hope today? It takes a bit of hope to be healed from the sadness that makes us ill, to be healed from the bitterness with which we pollute the Church and the world. Brothers and sisters, let us look at the crucifix. And what do we see? We see *Jesus naked, Jesus stripped, Jesus wounded, Jesus tormented*. Is it the end of everything? That is where our hope is.

In these two aspects, let us then grasp how hope, which seems to have died, is reborn. First of all, we see Jesus stripped of his clothing. In fact, “when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots” (v. 35). God is stripped — he who has everything allowed himself to be stripped of everything. But that humiliation is the path of our redemption. This is how God wins out over our appearances. Indeed, we find it difficult to bare ourselves, to be truthful. We always try to cover the truth because we do not like it. We clothe ourselves with outward appearances that we look for and take good care of, masks to disguise ourselves and to appear better than we are. This is a bit like the habit of “make-up”: interior make-up, to seem better than others.... We think it is important to show off, to appear like this so others will speak well of us. And we adorn ourselves with appearances, we adorn ourselves with appearances, with unnecessary things. But we do not find peace this way. Then the make-up goes away and you look at yourself in the mirror with the ugly, but true, face you have — the one that God loves — not the one with make-up on. And stripped of everything, Jesus reminds us that hope is reborn when we are truthful about ourselves — to tell ourselves the truth — by letting go of duplicity, by freeing ourselves from peacefully co-existing with our falsity. Sometimes, we are so used to telling ourselves lies that we live with the lies as if they were truths, and we end up being poisoned by our own falsity. This is what is needed: to return to the heart, to the essentials, to a simple life, stripped of so many useless things that are surrogates of hope. Today, when everything is complex and we risk getting off track, we need simplicity, we need to rediscover the value of sobriety, the value of renunciation, to clean up what pollutes our hearts and makes us sad. Each one of us can think of something useless that we can free ourselves from to find ourselves again. Think about how many

things are useless. Here, 15 days ago at Santa Marta, where I live — it is a hotel for a lot of people — the idea circulated that for this Holy Week it would be good to look in our closets and “strip” them, to give away the things we have that we do not use. You cannot imagine the number of things! It is good to strip ourselves of useless things. And this went to the poor, to the people in need. We too, have many useless things inside our hearts — and outside as well. Look at your closets: look at them. This is useful, this is useless ... and do some cleaning there. Look at the closet of your soul: how many useless things you have, how many stupid illusions. Let us return to simplicity, to things that are true, that do not need to be made-up. What a good exercise!

Let us direct a second glance towards the Crucifix and see *wounded Jesus*. The cross shows the nails that pierce his hands and feet, his open side. But in addition to the wounds in his body, there are those of his soul. How much anguish; Jesus is alone, betrayed, handed over and denied by his own — by his friends and even his disciples — condemned by the religious and civil powers, excommunicated. Jesus even feels abandoned by God (cf. v. 46). In addition, the reason for his condemnation appears on the cross: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (v. 37). This is a mockery: He who had fled when they wanted to make him king (cf. *Jn* 6:15), is now condemned for having made himself king. Even though he had committed no crime, he was placed in between two criminals, and the violent Barabbas was given preference over him (cf. *Mt* 27:15-21). In the end, Jesus is wounded in body and in soul. I ask myself: In what way does this help our hope? In this way, what does Jesus, naked, stripped of everything, of everything, say to my hope, how does he help me?

We too are wounded — who isn't in life? And they are often hidden wounds we hide out of embarrassment. Who does not bear the scars of past choices, of misunderstandings, of sorrows that remain inside and are difficult to overcome? But also of wrongs suffered, sharp words, unmerciful judgements? God does not hide the wounds that pierced his body and soul from our eyes. He shows them so we can see that a new passage can be opened with Easter: to make *holes of lights* out of our own wounds. “But, Your Holiness, you are exaggerating”, someone might say to me. No, it is true. Try it, try it. Try doing it. Think about your wounds, the ones you alone know about, that everyone has hidden in their heart. And look at the Lord and you will see, you will see how holes of light come out of those wounds. Jesus does not accuse on the cross, but loves. He loves and forgives those who hurt him (cf. *Lk* 23:34). In this way, he converts evil into good; in this way, he converts and transforms sorrow into love.

Brothers and sisters, the point is not whether we are wounded a little or a lot in life; the point is what to do with my wounds — the little ones, the big ones, the ones that will leave their mark on my body, on my soul, forever. What do I do with my wounds? What do you and you do with your wounds? “No, Father, I don't have any wounds” — “Be careful, think twice before saying this”. And I ask you: what do you do with your wounds, with the ones only you know about? You can allow them to infect you with resentment and sadness, or instead unite them to those of Jesus, so that these wounds may become luminous too. Think of how many young people do not tolerate their

own wounds and look for a way of salvation in suicide. Today, in our cities, so many young people see no other way out, they have no hope, and prefer to “go beyond”, using drugs to forget... poor people. Think about this. And you, what is the drug you use to hide your wounds? Our wounds can become springs of hope when, instead of feeling sorry for ourselves or hiding them, we dry the tears shed by others; when, instead of nourishing resentment for what was robbed from us, we take care of what others are lacking; when, instead of dwelling on ourselves, we bend towards those who suffer; when, instead of being thirsty for love for ourselves, we quench the thirst of those in need of us. For it is only if we stop thinking of ourselves that we will find ourselves again. But if we continue to think of ourselves, we will not find ourselves anymore. And it is by doing this, the Scriptures say, that our wound is healed quickly (cf. *Is* 58:8), and hope flourishes anew. Think about this: What can I do for others? I am wounded. I am wounded by sin, I am wounded by my past, everyone has their own wound. What do I do? Do I lick my wounds for the rest of my life? Or do I look at the wounds others have and go with the wounded experience of my life to heal, to help others? This is today’s challenge for all of you, for each of you, for each one of us. May the Lord help us move forward.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada and the United States of America. May this Holy Week lead us to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. In the intense spiritual climate of Holy Week, I invite each of you to contemplate the mystery of the Lord’s Passion, Death and Resurrection in order to draw from it the strength to put the Gospel’s demands into practice in our lives.

And let us not forget to pray for battered Ukraine.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEALS

Tomorrow is International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. I hope it will contribute to intensifying ideas of solidarity and expressions of friendship and fraternal sharing.

During this Holy Week of the Passion of Christ, commemorating his unjust death, I remember in a special way all the victims of war crimes and, as I invite you to pray for them, let us lift up a prayer to God so that everyone's heart may be converted. And, looking at Mary, Our Lady, in front of the Cross, my thoughts turn to mothers: to the mothers of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers who have fallen during the war. They are mothers whose sons have died. Let us pray for these mothers.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In these days of Holy Week, we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The cross, which first seems a sign of defeat and despair, proves instead to be the tree of life and the source of undying hope. Our contemplation of the crucified Jesus, in his nakedness and humiliation, invites us to strip ourselves of false illusions, to acknowledge the truth about ourselves, and to find healing and the possibility of a new beginning. The sufferings that Jesus embraced for our sake were not merely physical, but also included the human experiences of betrayal, denial and even, on the cross, abandonment by the Father. In Jesus' wounds, we can see our own; in his obedience to the Father's will and his forgiveness of those who crucified him, he shows the victory of God's love and offers us the hope of interior renewal and redemption. In these coming days, let us draw near to the Lord and place our hope in the power of his cross to turn evil into good, and suffering into a generous love of our brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest need.
