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As the third year of his pontificate begins Francis announces an extraordinary Jubilee

Under the sign of mercy



Sr Francis, "The Merciful Father"
(2010, Palencia, Becerril de Campos, Augustinian Monastery of the Conversion)

Francis began the third year of his pontificate under the sign of mercy. On Friday afternoon, 13 March, the anniversary of his election, during a reconciliation service in the Vatican Basilica, the Pope announced a Holy Year of Mercy. The extraordinary Jubilee will begin on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will conclude on 20 November 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King. Organization of the Jubilee Year has been entrusted to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

The Rite of Reconciliation took place significantly on the eve of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, on which the mercy of God the Father is celebrated in a special way. On Thursday the 12th, receiving participants in the Course on the Internal Forum, organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary, Francis compared confession to a celebration of embrace, inviting those present to "live the sacrament as the means to an education in mercy", for, he said "there is no sin God cannot forgive".

Rite of Reconciliation in St Peter's

The great pardon

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To the Course on the Internal Forum

A celebration of the embrace

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What changes the world

RINO FISICHELLA

A Holy Year dedicated to mercy. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the entire programme of Pope Francis' pontificate has revolved around mercy. Even if the Jubilee Year was announced rather suddenly, it should come as no surprise. It was announced on the anniversary of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's election to the See of Peter. In many respects, his proclamation of an extraordinary Holy Year simply reaffirms what Francis wrote in his programmatic document *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice... and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved" (n. 24). This is precisely the initiative the Pope has taken, bringing along the whole Church with him in an adventure of contemplation and prayer, conversion and pilgrimage, responsibility and witness, living the dream of charity in every corner of daily life: an initiative Francis already alluded to in his very first Angelus address, saying, "Mercy... This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world."

It is hardly a coincidence that the Jubilee was announced during a communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. Pope Francis, addressing the theme of mercy, spoke about the primary place where each of us can directly experience God's love through the overwhelming power of forgiveness: Confession. The image of the Pope kneeling in front of the confessional eloquently expresses the beauty of this sacrament, which is too often forgotten. Francis' words at the first Angelus following his election still echo with all their initial force: "Let us not forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us... we ourselves tire, we do not want to ask, we grow weary of asking for forgiveness. He never tires of forgiving". Ever since Francis' election to the papacy two years ago, many people have returned to the confessional, precisely because they were struck by the Pope's invitation

Pope Francis expresses solidarity with the people of Nigeria

The courage to reconcile

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Praying for victims in Pakistan



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At the General Audience the Pope speaks about children

The treasure of humanity

Children are the treasure of humanity and the Church, for they call us back to that necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of God: acknowledging that we are not self-sufficient, that we need love and forgiveness. This was the Pope's reflection on 18 March.

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VATICAN BULLETIN

AUDIENCES

Thursday, 12 March

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches

Archbishop Girolamo Prigione titular Archbishop of Lauriacum, Apostolic Nuncio

Archbishop Andrés Carrascosa Coso, titular Archbishop of Eloy, Apostolic Nuncio in Panama

Members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, on a visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*:

– Archbishop Thaddeus Cho Hwan-kil of Daegu

– Bishop Matthias Ri Iong-hoon of Suwon with the Auxiliary Linus Lee Seong-hyo, titular Bishop of Turris Tamalleni

– Bishop Peter Lee Ki-heon of Uijeongbu with Bishop emeritus Joseph Lee Han-taek, SJ

– Bishop Jacobus Kim Ji-Seok of Wonju

– Bishop John Chrysostom Kwon Hyeok-ju of Andong

– Bishop Paul Hwang Chul-soo of Busan with the Auxiliary Joseph Son Sam-seok, titular Bishop of Fesseë

– Bishop Gabriel Chang Bong-hun of Cheongju

– Bishop Francis Xavier Ahn Myong-ok of Masan with Bishop emeritus Michael Pak Jeong-il

– Bishop Francis Xavier Yu Sool, OFM, Military Ordinary

– Bishop Wenceslao S. Padilla, CICM, titular Bishop of Tharros, Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Saturday, 13 March

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, PSS, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops

Archbishop Orlando Antonini, titular Archbishop of Formia and Apostolic Nuncio in Serbia

Monday, 16 March

Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

Members of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on a visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*:

– Cardinal Vinko Puljić, Archbishop of Vrhbosna, Sarajevo, with the Auxiliary Pero Sudar, titular Bishop of Selja

– Bishop Franjo Komarica of Banja Luka with the Auxiliary Marko Semren, OFM, titular Bishop of Abaradira

– Bishop Ratko Perić of Mostar-Duvno, Apostolic Administrator of Trebinje and Mrkan

– Bishop Tomo Vukšić, Military Ordinary

Bro. Alois, Prior of Taizé

Their Excellencies Mr Gian Franco Terenzi and Mr Guerrino Zanotti, Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino with their respective wives and entourage

CHANGES IN EPISCOPATE

The Holy Father appointed Fr John Stowe, OFM Conv., as Bishop of Lexington, USA. Until now he has been vicar provincial of the Conventual Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Consolation and rector of the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Carey, Ohio (12 Mar.).

Bishop-elect Stowe, 48, was born in Amherst, USA. He holds a degree in philosophy, a Master's in Divinity and a Licence in Church History. He made his solemn vows for the

Order of Friars Minor Conventual on 1 August 1992 and was ordained a priest on 16 September 1995. He has served in parish ministry and as parish administrator of Our Lady of the Valley; vicar general and chancellor of the Diocese of El Paso.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Thomas Anthony Daly as Bishop of Spokane, USA. Until now he has been titular Bishop of Tabahta and Auxiliary of San Jose in California, USA (12 mar.).

Bishop Daly, 54, was born in San Francisco, USA. He was ordained a priest on 9 May 1987. He was ordained a bishop on 25 May 2011, subsequent to his appointment as titular Bishop of Tabahta and Auxiliary of San Jose in California.

The Holy Father appointed Fr Alojz Cvikl, SJ, as Metropolitan Archbishop of Maribor, Slovenia. Until now he has served as treasurer of the Archdiocese (14 Mar.).

Archbishop-elect Cvikl, 59, was born in Celje, Slovenia. He was ordained a priest on 3 July 1983. He completed his studies in philosophy and theology and holds a licence in pedagogy and the social sciences. He has served in parish ministry and as: rector of the St Stanislaw Archiepiscopal Institute's boarding section in Ljubljana-Sentvid and as teacher of religion at the Classical Lycée of the same Institute; provincial of the Jesuits in Slovenia; president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Slovenia; rector of the Pontifical Russian College (*Russicum*), in Rome.

EASTERN CHURCHES

The Holy Father gave his assent to the canonical election by the Synod

of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church of Fr Teodor (Taras) Martynyuk, MSU, as Auxiliary of the Archeparchy of Ternopil-Zboriv, Ukraine, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Mopta. Until now he has been Hegumen of the Dormition Lavra in Univ, Ukraine (12 Mar.).

Bishop-elect Martynyuk, 41, was born in Yaremche, Ukraine. He holds a doctorate in Oriental Canon Law. In 1997 he made his solemn profession with the Studite Monks of Ukraine and was ordained a priest on 20 January 2000. He has served in various capacities at the Monastery of Lavra, Univ and at St Michael's monastery in Lviv; as Hegumen of the Holy Dormition Lavra, Univ; and professor of Eastern Canon Law at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

At the conclusion of a special session held from 10 to 14 March, the Synod of Bishop of the Maronite Patriarchal Church in Lebanon, has:

– accepted the resignation of Bishop Elias Sleiman from his office as Eparchy of Lattaquié, Syria. It was presented in accord with can. 210 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (14 Mar.).

– appointed Bishop Elias Sleiman as President of the Patriarchal Court of Appeal (14 Mar.);

– appointed Bishop Joseph Mouawad as Bishop of Zahlé. Until now he has been titular Bishop of Ptolemais in Phoenicia for Maronites and patriarchal vicar of Ehdén Zgorta, Syria (14 Mar.);

– appointed, with Pontifical assent, Rev. Chorbishop Antoine Chbeir as Bishop of Lattaquié, Syria. Until now he has been chancellor of the Patriarchal Vicariate of

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Audience with the Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino

On Monday, 16 March, the Holy Father received in audience the Captains Regent of the Most Serene Republic of San Marino, Their Excellencies Giancarlo Terenzi and Guerrino Zanotti, who subsequently met with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, accompanied by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States.

During the cordial discussions, deep satisfaction was expressed regarding the good relations between the Holy See and the Republic of San Marino, and the active collaboration in the social field between public institutions and the Church was underlined.

Finally, mention was made of the fruitful collaboration between the Holy See and the Republic of San Marino at a bilateral level and in the context of the international community.



With a delegation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network on the Social Doctrine of the Church

On Monday, 16 March, the Holy Father received in audience a delegation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network on the Social Doctrine of the Church. The meeting took place in the Library at the Vatican's Apostolic Palace. The Delegation was composed of six members: Ms Rosana Mazini, President; Mr Víctor Chávez, treasurer; Ms Roxana Esqueff, secretary; Mr Eduardo Ramos; Mr Roberto Sandoval; and the Jesuit Fr Juan Carlos Scannone, writer at the *Civiltà Cattolica*



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At the General Audience the Pope speaks about children

The treasure of humanity

But unfortunately excluded because they are not even allowed to be born

Addressing the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square for the General Audience on Wednesday, 18 March, Pope Francis spoke about humanity's treasure: children. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's address, which he delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning,

After reviewing the various members of the family – mother, father, children, siblings, grandparents –, I would like to conclude this first group of catecheses on the family by speaking about children. I will do so in two phases: today I will focus on the great gift that children are for humanity – it is true they are a great gift for humanity, but also really excluded because they are not even allowed to be born – and the next time I shall focus on several wounds that unfortunately harm childhood. Who come to mind are the many children I met during my recent journey to Asia: full of life, of enthusiasm, and, on the other hand, I see that in the world, many of them live in unworthy conditions.... In fact, from the way children are treated society can be judged, not only morally but also sociologically, whether it is a liberal society or a so-

ciety enslaved by international interests.

First of all children remind us that we all, in the first years of life, were completely dependent upon the care and benevolence of others. The Son of God was not spared this stage. It is the mystery that we contemplate every year at Christmas. The Nativity Scene is the icon which communicates this reality in the simplest and most direct way. It is curious: God has no difficulty in making Himself understood by children, and children have no difficulty in understanding God. It is not by chance that in the Gospel there are several very beautiful and powerful words of Jesus regarding the "little ones". This term, "babes", refers to all the people who depend on the help of others, and to children in particular. For example, Jesus says: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes" (Mt 11:25). And again: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones: for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 18:10).

Thus, children are in and of themselves a treasure for humanity

and also for the Church, for they constantly evoke that necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of God: that of not considering ourselves self-sufficient, but in need of help, of love, of forgiveness. We all are in need of help, of love and of forgiveness! Children remind us of another beautiful thing: they remind us that we are always sons and daughters. Even if one becomes an adult, or an elder, even if one becomes a parent, if one occupies a position of responsibility, underneath all of this is still the identity of a child. We are all sons and daughters. And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received. Sometimes in life we risk forgetting about this, as if we were the masters of our existence, and instead we are fundamentally dependent. In reality, it is a motive of great joy to feel at every stage of life, in every situation, in every social condition, that we are and we remain sons and daughters. This is the main message that children give us, by their very presence: simply by their presence they remind us that each and every one of us is a son or daughter.

But there are so many gifts, so many riches that children bring to



humanity. I shall mention only a few.

They bring their way of seeing reality, with a trusting and pure gaze. A child has spontaneous trust in his father and mother; he has spontaneous trust in God, in Jesus, in Our Lady. At the same time, his interior gaze is pure, not yet tainted by malice, by duplicity, by the "incrustations" of life which harden the heart. We know that children are also marked by original sin, that they are selfish, but they preserve purity, and interior simplicity. But children are not diplomats: they say what they feel, say what they see, directly. And so often they put their parents in difficulty, saying in front of other people: "I don't like this because it is ugly". But children say what they see, they are not two-faced, they have not yet learned that science of duplicity that we adults have unfortunately learned.

Furthermore, children – in their interior simplicity – bring with them the capacity to receive and give tenderness. Tenderness is having a heart "of flesh" and not "of stone", as the Bible says (cf. Ezek 36:26). Tenderness is also poetry: it is "feeling" things and events, not treating them as mere objects, only to use them, because they are useful....

Children have the capacity to smile and to cry. Some, when I pick them up to embrace them, smile; others see me dressed in white and think I am a doctor and that I am going to vaccinate them, and they cry... spontaneously! Children are like this: they smile and cry, two things which are often "stifled" in grown-ups, we are no longer capable.... So often our smile becomes a cardboard smile, fixed, a smile that is not natural, even an artificial smile, like a clown. Children smile spontaneously and cry spontaneously. It always depends on the heart, and often our heart is blocked and loses this capacity to smile, to cry. So children can teach us how to smile and cry again. But we must ask ourselves: do I smile spontaneously, frankly, with love or is my smile artificial? Do I still cry or have I lost the capacity to cry? These are two very human questions that children teach us.

For all these reasons Jesus invited his disciples to "become like children", because "the Kingdom of

Giovanni Battista Montini and his passion for Dante

The poet of theologians and the theologian of poets

Paul VI often asked his private secretary, Msgr Pasquale Macchi, to read aloud to him either a canto from Dante's *Divine Comedy* or a chapter from Manzoni's *The Betrothed*.

Cardinal Paul Poupard, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, recalled this habit of Blessed Paul VI during a meeting in the Franciscan *cenacolo* at the Church of Santa Croce in Florence on 17 March to commemorate the 750th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's birth and the 50th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* written by Paul VI, entitled *Altissimi Cantus*. It is no accident that this document was preceded by two letters, one written to the Archbishop of Ravenna and the other to the Archbishop of Florence, followed by Paul VI's personal greeting to the directors and associates of the Dante Alighieri Society given at a General Audience in Rome on 21 January 1966.

Cardinal Poupard noted that Paul VI, just like his predecessor Benedict XV, believed that the beauty of Dante's work consists in both the manifold way it brilliantly reveals truth, and in its use of a wide range of artistic devices. Paul VI even set up an endowed chair for Dante studies at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Mil-



Gustave Doré, "Dante and Virgil"

an, emphasizing the "ecumenical" aspect of his work. Dante is a universal poet for all people and all times. In fact, his grandeur "embraces heaven and earth, eternity and time, the mystery of God and the affairs of men, both sacred and profane teaching, as well as the understanding made possible by divine revelation and the light of natural reason." At the same time, Paul VI noted that the goal of the *Divine Comedy* is "preeminently practical and transformative," the objective being to help man pass from disorder to wisdom, sin to holiness, misery to happiness.

Paul VI thus celebrates Dante as the poet of theologians and the theologian of poets, a "master of exalted lyricism" insofar as his sub-

tlety of mind renders him a sharp theologian, the perfect guide within the sanctuary of poetry. A clear sign of Paul VI's passion for Dante is the gift he gave to the conciliar Fathers at Vatican II: a special edition of the *Divine Comedy*.

Benedict XV, paying tribute to Dante in his encyclical letter *In praecleara summorum copia hominum* (1921), offers Dante as an exemplary witness to the religious values that contribute to the promotion of human learning and, consequently, how their absence from the formation of young people undermines their maturation and intellectual growth as well as their acquisition of civil virtue. Benedict XV thus wishes Dante to be taken up as a teacher of Christian doctrine, both in the practice of the fine arts and in the development of virtue. In another passage of the encyclical, Benedict XV remarks that the greatest praise that can be given to Dante is that he was a "Christian poet," in other words, "someone who sang Christian doctrine in an almost angelic voice; a doctrine whose beauty and splendor Dante contemplated with his entire soul." Calling the *Comedy* the "Fifth Gospel," Benedict XV declared that Dante is "the most eloquent bard to sing and announce Christian wisdom." (*Gabriele Nicolò*)

Pope Francis expresses solidarity with the people of Nigeria

The courage to reconcile

Peace is "not only the absence of conflict or the result of political compromise or fatalistic resignation". It entails "a daily endeavour, a courageous and authentic effort to favour reconciliation, to promote experiences of sharing, to extend bridges of dialogue, to serve the weakest and the excluded". The Pope wrote this in letter he sent to Bishops of Nigeria, a densely-populated African nation now in the grips of increasingly ruthless and ferocious terrorism, fed by "new and violent forms of extremism and fundamentalism on ethnic, social and religious grounds". The following is the English text of the Pope's message.



Dear Brother Bishops,

While we walk this Lenten journey towards the Resurrection of the Lord united with the whole Church, I wish to extend to you, dear Archbishops and Bishops of Nigeria, a fraternal greeting, which I extend to the beloved Christian communities entrusted to your pastoral care. I would also like to share some thoughts with you on the current situation in your country.

Nigeria, known as the "African giant", with its more than 160 million inhabitants, is set to play a primary role, not only in Africa but in the world at large. In recent years, it has experienced robust growth in the economic sphere and has again reasserted itself on the world stage as an attractive market, on account of its natural resources as well as its commercial potential. It is now considered officially the single largest African economy. It has also distinguished itself as a political player widely committed to the resolution of crisis situations in the continent.

At the same time, your nation has had to confront considerable problems, among them new and violent

forms of extremism and fundamentalism on ethnic, social and religious grounds. Many Nigerians have been killed, wounded or mutilated, kidnapped and deprived of everything: their loved ones, their land, their means of subsistence, their dignity and their rights. Many have not been able to return to their homes. Believers, both Christian and Muslim, have experienced a common tragic outcome, at the hands of people who claim to be religious, but who instead abuse religion, to make of it an ideology for their own distorted interests of exploitation and murder.

I would like to assure you and all who suffer of my closeness. Every day I remember you in my prayers and I repeat here, for your encouragement and comfort, the consoling words of the Lord Jesus, which must always resound in our hearts: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27).

Peace – as you know so well – is not only the absence of conflict or the result of political compromise or fatalistic resignation. Peace is for us a gift which comes from on high; it is Jesus Christ himself, the Prince of Peace, who has made of two peoples one (cf. Eph 2:14). And only the man or woman who treasures the peace of Christ as a guiding light and way of life can become a peacemaker (cf. Mt 5:9).

At the same time, peace is a daily endeavour, a courageous and authentic effort to favour reconciliation, to promote experiences of sharing, to extend bridges of dialogue, to serve the weakest and the excluded. In a word, peace consists

in building up a "culture of encounter".

And so I wish here to express my heartfelt thanks to you, because in the midst of so many trials and sufferings the Church in Nigeria does not cease to witness to hospitality, mercy and forgiveness. How can we fail to remember the priests, religious men and women, missionaries and catechists who, despite untold sacrifices, never abandoned their flock, but remained at their service as good and faithful heralds of the Gospel? To them, most particularly, I would like to express my solidarity, and to say: do not grow tired of doing what is right!

We give thanks to the Lord for them, as for so many men and women of every social, cultural and religious background, who with great willingness stand up in concrete ways to every form of violence, and whose efforts are directed at favouring a more secure and just future for all. They offer us moving testimonies, which, as Pope Benedict XVI recalled at the end of the Synod for

Africa, show "the power of the Spirit to transform the hearts of victims and their persecutors and thus to re-establish fraternity" (*Africae Munus*, 20).

Dear Brother Bishops, in perseverance and without becoming discouraged, go forward on the way of peace (cf. Lk 1:79). Accompany the victims! Come to the aid of the poor! Teach the youth! Become promoters of a more just and fraternal society!

I gladly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I ask you to extend to priests, religious, missionaries, catechists, lay faithful and above all to those suffering members of the Body of Christ.

May the Resurrection of the Lord bring conversion, reconciliation and peace to all the people of Nigeria! I commend you to Mary, Queen of Africa, and I ask you also to pray for me.

FRANCIS

Secretary of State concludes visit to Belarus

Without struggle there is no faith

"May the voice of your prayer and of your witness resonate and reawaken the lukewarm hearts of those who have left" the Church "to pursue the myth of wealth, of loveless pleasure, of the selfishness that ends solidarity, of the indifference that destroys the sharing in joys

image of God from the hearts of believers".

The Secretary of State assured them that "the Pope bows before this history of sorrow", to the "immeasurable harm endured" by the people of Belarus in a succession of "wars, of holocaust, destruction, homicides, deportations". After all, he said, "when man falls away from God, he comes to know the depths of cruelty", gradually melding "with animals, falling prey to his most basic instincts". As shown by events happening "not far from here, in the beloved land of Ukraine, where violence explodes into brutality, to which we are eyewitnesses through the images" displayed by the mass media: "communities destroyed, defenceless children and elderly unsympathetically exterminated or forced to live long periods underground, as their world, the people they know and the people they love are being destroyed around them".

Therefore, according to the Secretary of State, "the drama of human freedom" poses a continuous struggle. And "without struggle there is no faith". Today in particular "the struggle is against the small idols that seek to take God's place; the mirage of easy wealth, the loss of the sense of good and evil, indifference, going to Church only for the sake of tradition, feeling ourselves Catholics as almost an ethnic identity, but then living without meaning, without purpose, without direction. Living selfishly, as if there were no God".



The Cardinal in the Cathedral of Minsk (AP)

and sorrows of others". This was the advice of Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, to the Catholic community of Belarus at the conclusion of his official visit from 12-15 March. On Sunday 15, the Archcathedral of Minsk was crowded, with children in particular, for the Mass celebrated by Cardinal Parolin, during which he applauded the country's Catholics, whom he noted are quite numerous despite the "truly difficult moments" they have experienced. He noted that not long ago "priests were deported, churches were destroyed, communities were scattered, while highly organized and relentless propaganda aimed to erase the

The treasure of humanity

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God belongs to those who are like them" (cf. Mt 18:3; Mk 10:14).

Dear brothers and sisters, children bring life, cheerfulness, hope, also troubles. But such is life. Certainly, they also bring worries and sometimes many problems; but better a society with these worries and these problems, than a sad, grey society because it is without children! When we see that the birth rate of a society is barely one percent, we can say that this society is sad, it is grey because it has no children.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from Great Britain, Denmark, Nor-

way, Sweden, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all!

To all I hope that their visit to the Eternal City may be an occasion to rediscover the faith and to grow in charity.

I address a special thought to *young people, to the sick and to newlyweds*. Tomorrow we shall be celebrating the Solemnity of St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. Dear *young people*, look to him as an example of a humble and discrete life; dear *sick people*, carry the cross with Jesus' putative father's attitude of silence and prayer; and you, dear *newlyweds*, build your family on the same love that bound Joseph to the Virgin Mary.

At the Angelus the Pope prays for victims in Pakistan

Persecution the world tries to hide

"May there be an end to this persecution of Christians, which the world tries to hide, and may there be peace". This was Pope Francis' appeal at the Angelus in St Peter's Square on Sunday, 15 March, recalling "with much sorrow", the attacks in Lahore, Pakistan, and praying for the victims and their family members. "God loves us with a free and boundless love". This, the Pope stated, "is the simplest expression that epitomizes all of the Gospel, the faith and theology". The following is a translation of his address which was delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning,

Today's Gospel again offers us the words that Jesus addressed to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). In hearing these words, we turn our heart's gaze to Jesus Crucified and we feel within us that God loves us, truly loves us, and He loves us so much! This is the simplest expression that epitomizes all of the Gospel, all of the faith, all of theology: *God loves us with a free and boundless love.*

This is how God loves us and God shows this love first through creation, as the Liturgy announces, in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer: "You have created all things, to fill your creatures with every blessing and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light". At the beginning of the world there is only the freely given love of the Father. St Irenaeus, a

saint of the first centuries, writes: "In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have one upon whom to confer His benefits" (*Adversus Haereses*, IV, 14, 1). It is like this, God's love is like this.

Thus the fourth Eucharistic Prayer continues: "Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death", but with your mercy "helped all men to seek and find you". He came with his mercy. As in creation, and also in the subsequent stages of salvation history, the freely given love of God returns: the Lord *chooses his people* not because they are deserving but because *they are the smallest among all peoples*, as He says. And when "the fullness of time" arrived, despite the fact that man had repeatedly broken the covenant, God, rather than abandoning him, formed a new bond with him,



Pakistani Christians praying in Lahore after the attack on 15 March

in the blood of Jesus – the bond of a new and everlasting covenant – a bond that nothing will ever break.

St Paul reminds us: "God, who is rich in mercy", – never forget that He is rich in mercy – "out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4). The *Cross of Christ* is the supreme proof of the mercy and love that God has for us: Jesus loved us "to the end" (Jn 13:1), meaning not only to the last instant of his earthly life, but to the farthest limit of love. While in creation the Father gave us proof of his immense love by giving us life, in the passion and death of his Son He gave us the proof of proofs: He came to suffer and die for us. So great is God's mercy: He loves us, He forgives us; God forgives all and God forgives always.

May Mary, who is the Mother of Mercy, place in our hearts the certitude that we are *loved by God*. May she be close to us in moments of difficulty and give us the sentiments of her Son, so our Lenten journey may be an experience of forgiveness, of welcome, and of charity.

After the Angelus:

Dear brothers and sisters, with sorrow, with much sorrow, I learned of today's terrorist attacks on two churches in the city of Lahore, Pakistan, which caused many deaths and injuries. They are Christian churches. Christians are being persecuted. Our brothers and sisters are spilling their blood solely because they are Christians. While I assure the victims and their families of my prayers, I ask the Lord, I implore the Lord, source of all goodness, the gift of peace and accord for that country; may there be an end to this persecution of Christians, which the world tries to hide, and may there be peace.

I address a cordial greeting to the faithful of Rome and to you, who have come from so many parts of the world. I greet the various groups of volunteers who, united in the commitment to solidarity, are taking part in the rally: "Together for the Common Good".

I am close to the people of Vanuatu, in the Pacific Ocean, battered by a powerful cyclone. I am praying for the deceased, the wounded and the homeless. I think those who went immediately to bring aid and relief.

I wish all of you a happy Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*

Archbishop Shaw

Day of prayer for victims

A "Day of prayer for the innocent lives of martyrs" is how today the Christians of Pakistan are remembering the victims of the terrorist attacks on Sunday, 15 March, as well as those who have been killed in the recent past simply for professing their faith.

It was a day dedicated to sorrow and tears, while the Christian community is questioning a future more insecure than ever. "We live in fear", explained Archbishop Sebastian Francis Shaw of Lahore, who spoke to *L'Osservatore Romano* by telephone after a security meeting that he attended along with local authorities. "We asked for security and protection. But I must say that these attacks are difficult to foresee and to prevent. They involve well-organized people, whom we do not know much about at this time. They appear to be Taliban but we have no way to tell whether or not they have ties with IS extremists".

Regarding Sunday's attack, the Archbishop stated, "No one could have expected it". The fear is that the local community may act in a fit rage when, instead, what is called for most of all is calm. "We are cooperating, we are receiving sufficient help from the authorities", the Archbishop said repeatedly, thanking the Pope for the beautiful words he said at the Angelus and also for his closeness. The local media, the prelate explained, are providing a range of news regarding what is happening to the Christian community, perhaps spurred by Pope Francis' intervention. This helps them to feel less isolated, although it does not suffice, as noted by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Pakistan. In a letter the Commission exhorted the Government "to adopt strong measures to protect the churches and the religious minorities in Pakistan", recalling that "the Christian community has already been targeted by extremists in the past". It was also recalled in the letter that the churches "had already been subjected to threats and have already asked police for greater security measures". However the sensation today is that, for Christians, security is just a miracle. (*Marco Bellizzi*)

The Holy Father to Catholic educators

It takes a good teacher

In an audience on Saturday, 14 March, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father addressed members of UCIM, an Italian association of Catholic school teachers, calling them to "persevere in the peripheries of schools, which cannot be abandoned to marginalization, exclusion, ignorance, crime". The following is a translation of the Pope's address which was given in Italian.

Dear Colleagues,

Allow me to address you as such, given that I too have been a teacher like you and I have fond memories of my days spent in the classroom with students. I cordially greet you



all and thank the President for his kind words.

Teaching is a beautiful profession, it's a pity teachers are poorly paid... because it is not just about the time they spend in school, then the time they spend preparing, the time they spend on each individual student: how to help them move forward.

It's true. It's an injustice. I think of my own country, which is what I know: there many unfortunate teachers have to work double shifts just to be able to earn a decent income. But what state is a teacher in after working a double shift? It is a poorly paid job, but it's beautiful because it allows us to see the people who are entrusted to our care grow day after day. It is a little like being parents, at least spiritually. It is a great responsibility!

Teaching is a serious commitment that only a mature and well-balanced person can undertake. Such a commitment can be intimidating, but remember that no teacher is ever alone: they always share their work with other colleagues and the entire educational community to which they belong.

Your association is 70 years old: what a beautiful age! It is only right to celebrate, but you can also begin to take stock of this lifetime. When you were born, in 1944, Italy

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"I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion. Therefore, I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy." The Holy Father made this announcement on Friday evening, 13 March, the second anniversary of his election to the See of Peter, during the celebration of penance in St Peter's Basilica. The following is a translation of the Pope's address, which was given in Italian.

This year again, on the eve of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are gathered to celebrate the penitential liturgy. We are united with the many Christians who, today, in every part of the world, have accepted the invitation to live this moment as a sign of the Lord's goodness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, indeed, allows us to draw near to the Father with trust to have the certainty of his forgiveness. He is truly "rich in mercy" and extends it abundantly upon those who appeal to Him with a sincere heart.

Being here to experience his love, in any case, is above all a fruit of his grace. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, God never ceases to demonstrate the wealth of his mercy throughout the centuries. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is a "gift from God". We can not do it alone. The power to confess our sins is a gift from God, it is a gift, it is "his work" (cf. Eph 2:8-10). Being touched with tenderness by his hand and molded by his grace allows us to draw near to the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty that we will be accepted by him in the name of God, and understood despite our wretchedness; and even to approach without a defence attorney: we have the One who alone gave his life for our sins! It is He who always defends us before the Father. He always defends us. As we exit the confessional, we will feel his strength which gives new life and restores ardor to the faith. After confession we are reborn.

The Gospel we have heard (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens to us a path of hope and comfort. It is good to feel Jesus' compassionate gaze upon us, just as it was felt by the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words persistently return: *love and judgment*.

There is the *love of the sinful woman* who humbles herself before the Lord;



During the penitential celebration in the Vatican Basilica Pope Francis proclaims a Holy Year of Mercy

The great pardon

but before that is the *merciful love of Jesus* for her, which drives her to approach him. Her tears of repentance and joy wash the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; the kisses are an expression of her pure love and the perfumed ointment poured in abundance attests to how precious He is in her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have unwavering certitude in her life: that of having been forgiven. And this certitude is beautiful! And Jesus gives her this certitude: in accepting her He demonstrates the love God has for her, just for her, a public sinner! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her many sins. He forgives her for all of them, for "she loved much" (Lk 7:47); and she adores Jesus because

she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. She feels that Jesus understands her with love, she who is a sinner. Thanks to Jesus, God lifts her many sins off her shoulders, He no longer remembers them (cf. Lk 43:25). For this is also true when God forgives. He forgets. God's forgiveness is great! For her now a new era begins; through love she is reborn into a new life.

This woman has truly encountered the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart; in sorrow, she showed repentance for her sins; by her tears, she appealed to divine goodness to receive forgiveness. For her there will be no judgment but that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy. The hero of this encounter is certainly love, a mercy which goes beyond justice.

What changes the world

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that day. Celebrating this Sacrament is always the beginning of a new walk of charity and solidarity. Indeed, mercy has a face: it is an encounter with Christ who asks to be recognized in his brothers and sisters. Revisiting the works of mercy, therefore, will be an indispensable part of this upcoming Jubilee.

The opening of the Holy Door will take place on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This too is no accident. Fifty years ago, it was in front of this same door that the Second Vatican Council came to a close. Opening the Holy Door at this time is a sign that Francis would like all of us to relive those intense four years of conciliar work reminding us of the Church's need to go out once more to the world. Vatican II, in fact, asked the Church to speak about God to a world that had changed, using a new, effective language that places Jesus Christ at the centre and encourages a living witness to Him. What could the world possibly expect from the

Church if not a message of mercy? It was in *Gaudium et Spes* that the conciliar Fathers dealt with the theme of how the Church can help contemporary society, emphasizing that "she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 42). More than any intervention in politics, economics, or society in general, the Church makes an entirely distinctive contribution to the world: she is an effective sign of God's mercy. By proclaiming an extraordinary Jubilee dedicated to mercy, Pope Francis has issued a clear reminder of the road indicated 50 years ago by the Conciliar Fathers and has reaffirmed the Church in her unerring task of the New Evangelization.

Mercy will become in this year the main protagonist in the Church's life, offering everyone an opportunity to experience the immeasurable breadth of God's paternal heart as He chose to reveal himself and make himself known as "rich in mercy and great in love".

Simon, the master of the house, the Pharisee, on the contrary, *doesn't manage to find the road of love*. Everything is calculated, everything is thought out.... He stands firm on the threshold of formality. It is an unpleasant thing, formal love, he doesn't understand. He is not capable of taking that next step forward to meet Jesus who will bring him salvation. Simon limits himself to inviting Jesus to lunch, but did not truly welcome him. In his thoughts Simon invokes only justice and in doing so he errs. *His judgment of the woman distances him from the truth* and prevents him from even understanding who his guest is. He stopped at the surface – at formality – incapable of seeing the heart. Before the parable of Jesus and the question of which servant would love more, the Pharisee responds correctly: "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more". Jesus doesn't fail to observe: "You have judged rightly" (Lk 7:43). When Simon's judgment is turned to love, then is he in the right.

Jesus' reminder urges each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we have a person before us. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart in order to see how much generosity everyone is capable of. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God; everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is the house where everyone is welcomed and no one is rejected. Her doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace may find the assurance of forgiveness. The greater the sin, the greater the love that must be shown by the Church to those who repent. With how much love Jesus looks at us! With how much love He heals our sinful heart! Our sins never scare Him. Let us consider the prodigal son who, when he decided to return to his father, considers making a speech, but



the father doesn't let him speak. He embraces him (cf. Lk 15:17-24). This is the way Jesus is with us. "Father, I have so many sins...." – "But He will be glad if you go: He will embrace you with such love! Don't be afraid".

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion. Therefore, I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (cf. Lk 6:36). And this especially applies to confessors! So much mercy!

This Holy Year will commence on the next Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will conclude on Sunday, 20 November 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe and living face of the Father's mercy. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, in order that it may come to life as a new step on the Church's journey in her mission to bring the Gospel of mercy to each person.

I am confident that the whole Church, which is in such need of mercy for we are sinners, will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God's mercy, with which we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time. Do not forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always. Let us never tire of asking forgiveness. Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our re-learned journey with an open heart, to receive the indulgence of God, to receive the mercy of God.

On the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II

In St Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis announced on 13 March 2015, the celebration of an "extraordinary Holy Year". This "Jubilee of Mercy" will commence with the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter's on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 2015, and will conclude on 20 November 2016 with the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. At the start of the new year, the Holy Father had stated: "This is the time of mercy. It is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth!"

The Jubilee announcement was made on the second anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, during his homily for the penitential liturgy with which the Holy Father opened the "24 Hours for the Lord". This initiative, proposed by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, encourages throughout the world the opening of churches for an extended period of time for the purpose of inviting people to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The theme for this year has been taken from the Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians, "God rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).

The opening of this next Jubilee will take place on the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. This is of great significance, for it impels the Church to continue the work begun at Vatican II. During the Jubilee, the Sunday readings for Ordinary Time will be taken from the Gospel of Luke, the one referred to as "the evangelist of mercy". Dante Alighieri describes him as "serba mansuetudinis Christi", "narrator of the meekness of Christ". There are many well-known parables of mercy presented in the Gospel of Luke: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the merciful father.

The official and solemn announcement of the Holy Year will take place with the public proclamation of the *Bolla* in front of the Holy Door on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Feast instituted by St John Paul II and celebrated on the Sunday after Easter.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition, the Jubilee Year, which was celebrated every 50 years, was meant to restore equality among all of the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom. In addition, the Jubilee Year was a reminder to the rich that a time would come when their Israelite slaves would once again become their equals and would be able to reclaim their rights. "Justice, according to the Law of Israel, consisted above all in the protection of the weak" (St John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 13).

The Catholic tradition of the Holy Year began with Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. Boniface VIII had envisioned a Jubilee every century. From 1475 onwards – in order to allow each generation to experience at least one Holy



Year – the ordinary Jubilee was to be celebrated every 25 years. However, an extraordinary Jubilee may be announced on the occasion of an event of particular importance.

Until present, there have been 26 ordinary Holy Year celebrations, the last of which was the Jubilee of 2000. The custom of calling extraordinary Jubilees dates back to the 10th century. The last extraordinary Holy Years, which were celebrated during the previous century, were those in 1933, proclaimed by Pius XI to celebrate 1,900 years of Redemption and in 1983, proclaimed by John Paul II on the occasion of the 1,500 years of Redemption.

The Catholic Church has given a more spiritual significance to the Hebrew Jubilee. It consists in a general pardon, an indulgence open to all, and the possibility to renew one's relationship with God and neighbour. Thus, the Holy Year is always an opportunity to deepen one's faith and to live with a renewed commitment to Christian witness.

With the *Jubilee of Mercy*, Pope Francis focuses attention upon the merciful God who invites all men and women to return to Him. The encounter with God inspires in the one the virtue of mercy.

The initial rite of the Jubilee is the opening of the Holy Door. This door is one which is only opened during the Holy Year and which remains closed during all other years. Each of the four major Basilicas of Rome has a Holy Door: St Peter's, St John Lateran, St Paul Outside-the-Walls and St Mary Major. This rite of the opening of the Holy Door illustrates symbolically the idea that, during the Jubilee, the faithful are offered an "extraordinary pathway" towards salvation.

The Holy Doors of the other Basilicas will be opened after the opening of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica.

Mercy is a theme very dear to Pope Francis, as is expressed in the episcopal motto he had chosen: "*miserando atque eligendo*". This citation is taken from the homily of St Bede the Venerable during which he commented on the Gospel passage of the calling of St Matthew: "*Vidit ergo Iesus publicanum et quia miserando atque eligendo vidit, ait illi Sequere me*" (Jesus therefore sees the tax collector, and since he sees by having mercy and by choosing, he

says to him, 'follow me'). This homily is a tribute to divine mercy. One possible translation of this motto is "With eyes of mercy".

Immediately after his election, the Holy Father stated: "Feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient" (*Angelus*, 17 March 2013).

In his *Angelus* on 11 January 2015, he stated: "There is so much need of mercy today, and it is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth! We are living in the age of mercy, this is the age of mercy". Then, in his 2015 Lenten Message, the Holy Father expressed: "How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference".

In the English edition of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the term mercy appears 32 times. Pope Francis has entrusted the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization with the organization of the *Jubilee of Mercy*.

List of jubilee years and their Popes:

- 1300: Boniface VIII
- 1350: Clement VI
- 1390: proclaimed by Urban VI, presided over by Boniface IX
- 1400: Boniface IX
- 1423: Martin V
- 1450: Nicholas V
- 1475: proclaimed by Paul II, presided over by Sixtus IV
- 1500: Alexander VI
- 1525: Clement VII
- 1550: proclaimed by Paul III, presided over by Julius III
- 1575: Gregory XIII
- 1600: Clement VIII
- 1625: Urban VIII
- 1650: Innocent X
- 1675: Clement X
- 1700: proclaimed by Innocent XII, closed by Clement XI
- 1725: Benedict XIII
- 1750: Benedict XIV
- 1775: proclaimed by Clement XIV, presided over by Pius VI
- 1825: Leo XII
- 1875: Pius IX
- 1900: Leo XIII
- 1925: Pius XI
- 1933: Pius XI
- 1950: Pius XII
- 1975: Paul VI
- 1985: John Paul II
- 2000: John Paul II
- 2015: Francis

In the years 1800 and 1850, due to the political circumstances of the times, there were no jubilees.

To a lay association

The full value of the Gospel

Live "the full value of the Gospel" was the source of inspiration 50 years ago, and gave rise to the lay group 'Seguimi' ['Follow Me'], as the Second Vatican Council was in full swing. Pope Francis brought the same proposal to the forefront in his address to members of the association,

inviting them to "be people decentralized" from themselves and to place their "vital core in the living Person of Jesus". The following is a translation of the address which the Holy Father delivered in Italian during his audience with them on Saturday morning, 14 March, in the Clementine Hall.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of your community, the lay group *Seguimi*. I warmly greet and thank



Cardinal Vallini, who has expressed your sentiments.

As has been recalled, this association was born during the Second Vatican Council, and drew inspiration from the Conciliar Magisterium to live "the full value of the Gospel", as affirmed by the title of one of your publications. The symbolic and deeply spiritual gesture of the first members to leave the Catacombs of St Callixtus are witnesses to this will, which you expressed in the statutory formula of your programme of life: "Jesus Christ alive is at the centre of *Seguimi*". This is really beautiful. I encourage you to live each day with commitment to this programme, which means to be people decentralized from yourselves and to place your vital core in the living Person of Jesus.

So often, in the Church too, we believe we are good Christians because we do well-organized social and charitable works. Okay, those are good things. But we must not forget that the sap that brings life and transforms hearts is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Let Him, the Lord, occupy the centre of your heart and your works. Precisely by remaining firmly united to Him, like branches to the vine (cf. Jn 15:1-9), you may go toward the peripheries of the world.

Your Founders have traced the foundational lines of *Seguimi* to its first members, following a new configuration beyond the classic forms of consecrated life, and to which the Pontifical Council for the Laity granted papal approval. The obligation of the evangelical counsels in a

general context of secularism is absorbed into the single fundamental requirement of *faithfulness* to the love of the Father, to Christ and to his Gospel, faithfulness to the action of the Holy Spirit who is love and freedom, faithfulness to the vocational pact among the members of the Group, to whom you are obliged not to fail. In *Seguimi*, fidelity is understood as the highest natural moral value, to which you are knowingly bound in order to respond to the call of God, without other positive legal constraints, confident that if faithfulness is truly lived, no other bonds are necessary. Thus, yours is a form of evangelical life to practice in a context of secularity and freedom. A programme of Christian life for lay people, with clear and demanding objectives, an original means to incarnate the Gospel, a effective way to walk in the world. The *different forms of belonging* likewise represent modalities of commitment and participation in the ideals of the unique community. Single and married people, each in his/her own life status, meet and share an enriching experience of complementarity.

Preserve and develop this *fraternal communion* and the exchange of gifts, aimed at the human and Christian growth of all, and at creativity, optimism, joy and the courage to go – when it's right – against the tide. Be vigilant on your spiritual journey and help each other to always practice mutual charity, which means protecting oneself from individualistic selfishness in order to be true Gospel witnesses.

As lay people, you are people immersed in the world and work hard within earthly realities in order to serve the good of mankind. You are called to transfuse Christian values into the areas in which you operate through your testimony and words, by meeting people in their actual situations, so they may have full dignity and may be fulfilled by salvation in Christ. He is the fulfillment of every human existence: indeed, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, He fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

I encourage you to be lay people on the front line, to be active members in the Church's mission, to live your secularity by dedicating yourselves to the actual realities of the earthly city: the family, professions, social life in its various expressions. Thus you can contribute, as a leaven, to insert the spirit of the Gospel into the folds of history with the witness of faith, of hope and charity.

Dear friends, may *Seguimi* increasingly be a form of Christian life and apostolic commitment which promotes and elevates its members, making them, together with others, leaders of a better world.

I bless you wholeheartedly. Please, do not forget to pray for me.

It takes a good teacher

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was still at war. You have come a long way since then! Schools have come a long way too. And Italian schools have moved forward with the help of your Association, which was founded by Professor Nosenigo Gesualdo, a religion teacher who felt the need to gather together the secondary school teachers of that time, who acknowledged with the Catholic faith, and who with this inspiration worked in the schools.

Throughout these years you have helped the country to grow, you have helped to reform schools, you have especially contributed to educate generations of young people.

Over the past 70 years Italy has changed, schools have changed, but there are always teachers willing to engage in their profession with that enthusiasm and willingness that faith in the Lord gives us.

As Jesus taught us, the Law and the Prophets are summed up in two commandments: love the Lord your God and love your neighbour (cf. Mt 22:34-40). We can ask ourselves: who is a teacher's neighbour? *Your students are your "neighbour"*! It is with them that you spend your days. It is they who await guidance, direction, a response – and, even before that, good questions!

Among the UCHIM's tasks, which cannot be lacking, is the call to enlighten and motivate a *just idea of the school*, sometimes overshadowed by discussions and reductive positions. School is certainly comprised of valid and qualified instruction, but also of human relations, which for us are welcoming and benevolent relations, to be offered indiscriminately to all. Indeed, the duty of a good teacher – all the more

for a Christian teacher – is to love his or her more difficult, weaker, more disadvantaged students with greater intensity. Jesus would say, if you love only those who study, who are well educated, what merit do you have? And there are some who make us lose our patience, but we must love them even more! Any teacher can do well with such students. I ask you to *love the "difficult" students more...* those who do not want to study, those who find themselves in difficult situations, the disabled and foreigners, who today pose a great challenge for schools.

If a professional association of Christian teachers wants to bear witness to their inspiration today, then it is called to persevere in the *peripheries of schools*, which cannot be abandoned to marginalization, exclusion, ignorance, crime. In a society that struggles to find points of reference, young people need a positive reference point in their school. The school can be this or become this only if it has teachers capable of giving meaning to school, to studies and to culture, without reducing everything to the mere transmission of technical knowledge. Instead they must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel accepted and loved for who he or she is, with all of his or her limitations and potential. In this direction, your task is more necessary now than ever. You must not only teach content, but the values and customs of life. There are three things that you must pass on. A computer can teach content, but to understand how to love, to understand values and customs which

create harmony in society, it takes a good teacher.

The Christian community has many examples of *great educators* who are dedicated to addressing the shortcomings of the educational system or to establishing schools in their own right. Let us think of, among others, St John Bosco, the bicentenary of whose birth is this year. He advised his priests: teach with love. The first attitude of an educator is love. You too, Christian teachers, can look to these figures to animate from within a school, which, regardless of whether it is state-run or not, needs credible educators and witnesses of a mature and complete humanity. Testimony. This is not bought, it is not sold: it is given.

As an Association, you are by nature *open to the future*, because there are always new generations of young people to whom you may pass on your wealth of knowledge and values. On a professional level it is important to *refresh your teaching skills*, especially in light of new technologies, but teaching is not just a job: teaching is a *relationship* in which each teacher must feel fully involved as a person, in order to give meaning to the task of educating their students. Your presence here today is proof that you have the motivation that the school needs.

I encourage you to renew your passion for humanity – you cannot teach without passion! – in the process of formation, and to be *witnesses of life and hope*. Never, never close a door, open all of them wide, in order for the students to have hope.

I also ask you, please, to pray for me, and I cordially bless you all.

Francis recalls that there is no sin that God can't forgive

A celebration of the embrace

Everyone should leave the confessional with happiness in their hearts

“Living the Sacrament as a means of educating in mercy; allowing yourself to learn from what we celebrate; safeguarding the supernatural gaze”. These are the “three exigencies” of the ministry of reconciliation that Pope Francis pointed out to new priests and seminarians attending the Course on the Internal Forum organized by the tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary. During the audience, which was held in the Clementine Hall on Thursday morning, 12 March, the Pontiff emphasized that “Confession should not be ‘torture’, but everyone should leave the confessional with happiness in their hearts”. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s address, which was delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers,

I am particularly glad, in this Season of Lent, to meet you on the occasion of the annual Course on the Internal Forum, organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary. I address a cordial greeting to Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Major Penitentiary, and I thank him for his courteous words. I thank him for the congratulations he offered me, but I would like to also share another anniversary: in addition to tomorrow’s, of the two years of my Pontificate, today marks the 57th year since I entered religious life. Pray for me! I greet the Regent, Msgr Krzysztof Nykiel, the Prelates, Officials and Staff of the Penitentiary, the Colleges of Ordinary and Extraordinary Confessors of the Papal Basilicas in *Urbe*, and all of you participants in the Course, which has as its pastoral aim that of helping new priests and candidates for Holy Orders to correctly administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Sacraments, as we know, are the locus of the closeness and the tenderness of God for mankind; they are the concrete way that God thought and wanted to come and meet us, to embrace us, without being ashamed of us and of our limitations.

Among the Sacraments, certainly Reconciliation renders present with particular efficacy the merciful face of God: it is constantly and ceaselessly made real and manifest. Let us never forget, both as penitents and confessors: there is no sin that God cannot forgive. None! Only that which is withheld from divine mercy cannot be forgiven, just as one who withdraws from the sun can be neither illuminated nor warmed.

In the light of this wondrous gift of God, I would like to highlight three exigencies: living the Sacrament as a means of educating in mercy; allowing yourself to learn from what we celebrate; safeguarding the supernatural gaze.

1. Living the Sacrament as a means of educating in mercy, means helping our brothers to experience human and Christian peace and understanding. Confession should not be “torture”, but everyone should leave the confessional with happiness in their hearts, with their faces

radiating hope, albeit at times – we know – bathed in the tears of conversion and joy derived from it (cf. Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 44). The Sacrament, with all of the penitent’s actions, does not mean it should become a harsh, annoying and intrusive interrogation. On the contrary, it should be a liberating encounter, enriched with humanity, through which one can educate in mercy, which does not exclude but rather includes the just obligation to atone for, to the extent possible, the wrong committed. Thus the faithful will feel called to confess frequently, and will learn to do so in the best of ways, with that gentleness of soul that does so much good for the heart – also the heart of the confessor! In this way we priests enable the personal relationship with God to grow, so that his Kingdom of love and peace expands in hearts.

So often being merciful is confused with being a lenient confessor.



But consider this: neither a lenient confessor nor a rigid confessor is merciful. Neither one. The first, because he says: “Go on, this is not a sin, go on, go!”. The other, because he says: “No, the law says...”. But neither of them treats the penitent as a brother, taking him by the hand and accompanying him in his conversion! One says: “Go, don’t worry, God forgives all. Go on, go!”. The other says: “No, the law says no”. The merciful one instead listens to him, forgives him, but carries his burden and accompanies him, because conversion, yes, has begun – perhaps – today, but it must continue with perseverance.... You carry his burden, as the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep and carries it. But it must not be confused: this is very important.

Mercy means carrying the burden of a brother or sister and helping them walk. Do not say “ah, no, go on, go!”, nor be rigid. This is very important. And who can do this? The confessor who prays, the confessor who weeps, the confessor who knows that he is more a sinner than the penitent, and if he himself has never done the bad thing that the penitent speaks of, it is but for the grace of God. Merciful is being close and accompanying the process of conversion.

2. It is precisely to you confessors that I say: *let yourselves learn from the Sacrament of Reconciliation!* Second point. How many times does it happen to us that hearing confessions edifies us! Brothers and sisters who live an authentic personal and ecclesial communion with the Lord and a sincere love for their brothers. Simple souls, souls poor in spirit, who abandon themselves totally to the Lord, who trust in the Church and, therefore, also in their confessor. Often, we are also called on to witness genuine miracles of conversion. People who for months, sometimes years have been under the dominion of sin and who, like the prodigal son, come to their senses and decide to arise and return to the Father’s house (cf. Lk 15:18), to implore his forgiveness. How beautiful it is to welcome these contrite brothers and sisters with the sanctifying embrace of the merciful Father, who loves us so much and holds a feast for every child that returns to Him with all his/her heart!

How much we can learn from the conversion and from the repentance of our brothers and sisters! They urge us too to perform an examination of conscience: Do I, a priest, love the Lord as much as this elderly woman? Am I, a priest who was made a minister of his mercy, able to have the mercy that is in the heart of this penitent? Am I, a confessor, open to change, to conversion, like this penitent, at whose service I have been placed? So often these people edify us, they edify us.

3. When we hear the sacramental confessions of the faithful, we must always keep the inner gaze turned to Heaven, to the supernatural. We must above all rekindle in ourselves the awareness that no one is placed in this ministry through his own merit; nor through his theological or juridical expertise, nor through his human or psychological characteristics. We all were constituted ministers of reconciliation purely by the grace of God, freely and through love, indeed through mercy. I, who have done this and this and this, must now forgive.... I am reminded of that final passage of Ezekiel 16, when the Lord denounces, in very harsh words, the unfaithfulness of the people. But in the end He says: “I will forgive you and will place you above your sisters – the other peoples – to judge them, and you will be more important than them,



Giovanni Ghidotti, “Confession” (2011)

and I will do this to shame you, so that you will be ashamed of what you have done”. The experience of shame: am I, in hearing this sin, this soul who regrets with such remorse or with such frailty of spirit, capable of being ashamed of my sins? This is a grace. We are ministers of mercy thanks to the mercy of God; we must never lose this supernatural gaze, which renders us truly humble, accepting and merciful toward every brother and sister who asks to confess. And if I have not done this, have not fallen into that awful sin or am not in prison, it is purely by the grace of God, only for this reason! Not by our own merit. And we must feel this at the moment of administering the Sacrament. The manner of listening to the admission of sins must also be supernatural: listen in a supernatural way, in a divine manner; respecting the dignity of each one’s personal history, so as to be able to understand what God wants from him or her. This is why the Church is called to “initiate her members – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 169). Even the worst sinner who comes before God to ask forgiveness is “sacred ground”, and I too, who must forgive him in the name of God, can do things more loathsome than those that he has done. Each faithful penitent who approaches the confessional is “sacred ground”, sacred ground to “cultivate” with devotion, care and pastoral attention.

I hope, dear brothers, that you profit from this Lenten Season through personal conversion and by generously dedicating yourselves to hearing Confessions, in order that the People of God may arrive purified at the Paschal feast, which represents the definitive victory of Divine Mercy over all the evil in the world. Let us entrust ourselves to the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy and Refuge of Sinners. She knows how to help us, we sinners. I really like reading the Stories of St Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, and various chapters of his book, *The Glories of Mary*. These stories of Our Lady, who is ever the refuge of sinners and seeks the way for the Lord to forgive all. May she teach us this art. I heartily bless you. I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you.

Morning Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae

Thursday, 12 March

Hearts of stone

There are no compromises: either we let ourselves be loved "by the mercy of God" or we choose the way "of hypocrisy" and do as we please, allowing our heart to keep growing harder. This is the history of the relationship between God and man, from the time of Abel until now. It was the focus of Pope Francis' homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning.

The Pontiff began with the words of the Responsorial Psalm – "Harden not your hearts" – and asked: "Why does this happen?". To find the answer, he referred to the First Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah (7:23-28), which somewhat summarizes the "history of God". But can we really say that "God has a history?". How is this possible, given that "God is eternal"? It's true, Francis explained, "from the moment that God began to dialogue with his people, He entered history".

And the history of God with his people "is a sad history", because "God gave everything" and in exchange "He received only unpleasant things". The Lord said: "Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper". That was the "way" to happiness. "But they obeyed not, nor did they pay heed". Instead, they obstinately continued to walk "in the hardness of their evil hearts". In other words, they did not want to "listen to the Word of God".

That choice, the Pope explained, has characterized the entire history of the People of God: "let us consider the assassination, the death of Abel, killed by his brother, the evil

heart of envy". Yet, although the people continually "turned their backs" to the Lord, He "never tired". In fact, he "untiringly" sent the prophets. But still, man did not listen. Instead, Scripture tells us: "they have stiffened their necks and done worse than their fathers". Thus, "the situation of the People of God worsened through generations".

The Lord says to Jeremiah: "When you speak all these words to them, they will not listen to you, they will not answer. Say to them: This is the nation that does not listen to the voice of the Lord, or take correction". And then, the Pope explained, He adds something "terrible: 'Faithfulness has disappeared'. You are not a faithful people". Here, Francis said, it seems that God is weeping: "I have loved you so much, I have given you so much..." but you have done "everything against me". A weeping which evokes that of Jesus "looking at Jerusalem". After all, the Pontiff explained, "all of this history, in which faithfulness had disappeared, was in Jesus' heart". A history of unfaithfulness regarding "our personal history", because "we do our own will. But in doing so, on the journey of life, we follow a path of hardening: the heart hardens, it turns to

stone. The Word of the Lord doesn't enter. The people fall away". This is why, the Pope indicated, "today, on this Lenten day, we can ask ourselves: do I listen to the voice of the Lord, or do I do what I want, whatever I please?".

The advice of the Responsorial Psalm – "Harden not your hearts" – is found "so many times in the Bible" which, to explain the "unfaithfulness of the people", often uses "the figure of the adulteress". Francis recalled, for example, the well-known passage from Ezekiel 16: "Yours is a long history of adultery. You, the people, have not been faithful to me, you have been an adulterous people". There were also many times in which Jesus "rebukes the disciples for this hardened heart", as He does with those on the road to Emmaus: "O foolish and hardhearted ones!".

The Pope explained that the evil heart – of which "we all have a little" – "doesn't allow us to understand God's love. We want to be free", but "with a freedom that enslaves us in the end, rather than that freedom of love that the Lord offers us".

This, the Pope highlighted, also happens in institutions. For example, "Jesus heals a person, but the heart of the doctors of the law, of the priests, of the legal system, are so hard, they are always looking for excuses". And therefore they say to Him: "You drive out demons in the name of the demon. You are a demonic sorcerer". The legalists "believe that the life of faith is regulated only by the laws that they make". Jesus called them "hypocrites, whitewashed tombs, outwardly beautiful but inside filled with iniquity and hypocrisy".

Unfortunately, Francis said, the same thing "happened in the history of the Church". Let us consider

"poor Joan of Arc: today she's a saint! Poor girl: these experts burned her alive because, they said, she was a heretic". Or let's think, more recently, of "Blessed Rosmini: all of his books were on the Index. You couldn't read them, it was a sin to read them. Today he is blessed". In this regard the Pontiff underscored that, as "in the history of God with his people, the Lord sent his prophets to tell them that He loved his people", likewise, "in the Church, the Lord sends saints". It is they "who lead forth the life of the Church: it is the saints. It isn't the powerful, it isn't the hypocrites". It is the "holy man, the holy woman, the child, the holy youth, the holy priest, the holy sister, the holy bishop...". In other words, it is they "whose hearts are not hard", but are instead "always open to the Lord's word of love". It is they who "aren't afraid to let themselves be caressed by the mercy of God. This is why saints are men and women who understand such misery, human misery, and accompany people closely. They do not scorn people".

The Lord is clear with the people who "have lost their faithfulness": "Those who aren't with me are against me". One could ask: "Isn't there a way to compromise, a little here and a little there?". No, the Pontiff said. "Either you are on the path of love, or you're on the path of hypocrisy. Either you let yourself be loved by the mercy of God, or you do what you want, according to your heart which grows harder, each time, on this path". There is no "third path of compromise: either you're holy or you take the other path". Whoever "doesn't gather" with the Lord, not only "abandons things" but "worse: scatters, destroys. He/she is a corruptor", one "who corrupts".

Because of this unfaithfulness, "Jesus weeps over Jerusalem" and "weeps over each one of us". In Matthew Chapter 23, the Pope recalled, there is a terrible curse against the "leaders who have hardened hearts and want to harden the hearts of the people". Jesus says: "upon them will come the blood of all the innocent, beginning with that of Abel. They will be held accountable for all the innocent blood, shed by their wickedness, by their hypocrisy, by their corrupt, hardened, petrified hearts".

Monday, 16 March

How we are changed

We are the "dream of God" who, truly in love, wants to "change our life". Through love. He only asks us to have the faith to let Him do so. And thus "we can only cry for joy" before a God who "re-creates" us, Pope Francis said on Monday morning during Mass at Santa Marta.

In the First Reading, a passage from Isaiah (65:17-21), "the Lord tells us that He creates new heavens and a new earth, that is, He re-creates things", Francis explained, also recalling that "we have spoken many times of these 'two creations' of



VATICAN BULLETIN

RELATIONS WITH STATES

The Holy Father appointed Archbishop Giorgio Lingua, titular Archbishop of Tuscania, as Apostolic Nuncio in Cuba. Until now he has been Apostolic Nuncio in Iraq and Jordan (17 Mar.).

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

On Saturday, 14 March, the Holy Father appointed as Consultors of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops the following: Msgr Lluís Clavell, ordinary member of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas; Fr Giuseppe Bonfrate, professor at the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome; Fr Maurizio Gronchi, ordinary professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical Urbanian University, Rome; Fr Michele Giulio Masciarelli, professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Faculty of the Marianum, Rome and Fundamental

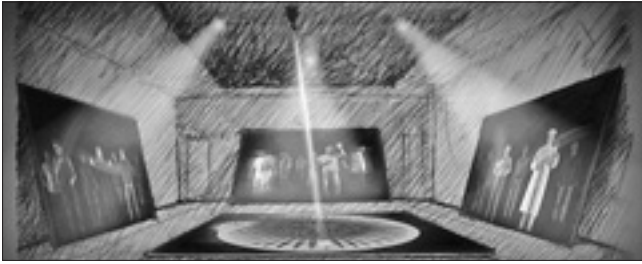
Theology at the Abruzzese-Molise Institute of Theology in Chieti; Fr Peter Paul Saldanha, professor of Ecclesiology at the Pontifical Urbanian University, Rome; Fr Dario Vitali, professor of Ecclesiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome; Fr Aimable Musoni, SDB, professor of Systematic Theology, Ecclesiology and Ecumenism at the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome; Fr François-Xavier Dumortier, SJ, rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome; Fr Georges Ruysen, SJ, professor of Canon Law at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome; Fr Sabatino Majorano, CSSR, professor of Systematic Moral Theology at the Alphonsian Academy, Rome; Fr Manuel Jesús Arroba Conde, CME, President of the Institute Utriusque Iuris at the Pontifical Lateran University; Fr José Granados, DCJM, vice-dean of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, professor at the Gregorian University.

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Jounieh, Lebanon, and parish priest of Notre Dame des Dons in Adma (14 Mar.).

Bishop Mouawad, 44, was born Mayfouq, Lebanon. He was ordained a priest on 13 August 1995. He was ordained a bishop on 16 June 2012, subsequent to his appointment as titular Bishop Ptolemais in Phoenicia for Maronites.

Bishop-elect Chbeir, 54, was born in Ghosta, Lebanon. He was ordained a priest on 13 June 1988. He holds a doctorate in Biblical theology. He has served in various parishes in Italy, New York, London and Dublin. On his return to Lebanon he served in parish ministry and as: diocesan secretary and chancellor member on the Council for Economic Affairs; head of the Commission for Vocations and of the Biblical formation of youth. He has translated various articles into Arabic, including Benedict XVI's book *Light of the World*.



Studio Azzurro, "In the beginning (and then)" (2013, draft project of the interactive video installation on the theme of Creation made for the Holy See's Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennial).

God: the first, which was done in six days, and the second, when the Lord 're-makes' the world, destroyed by sin, in Jesus Christ". And, the Pontiff emphasized, "we have said so many times that this second one is more marvelous than the first". Indeed, he explained, "the first is already a marvelous creation; but the second, in Christ, is even more marvelous".

In his meditation, however, Francis paused "on another aspect", beginning from the passage of Isaiah in which "the Lord speaks about what He is going to make: a new heaven, a new earth". And "we find that the Lord has much enthusiasm: He speaks of joy and says a word: 'I will rejoice in my people'". Essentially, "the Lord thinks about what He is going to do, He thinks that He, He himself will rejoice with his people". Thus, "it is as if it were a 'dream' of the Lord, as if the Lord 'were dreaming' of us: how beautiful it will be when we are all together, when we are there or when that person, or that one, or another one will walk...".

Further clarifying his rationale, Francis returned to "a metaphor that can help us understand: it is as if a young woman with her boyfriend, or a young man with his girlfriend, were to think: 'when we are together, when we get married...'. Thus, "God's 'dream': God thinks about each one of us, loves us, dreams of us, dreams of the joy that He will rejoice with us". And this is the very reason that "the Lord wants to 're-create us', to make our hearts new, to 're-create' our heart in order to make joy triumph".

All this led the Pope to ask a few questions: "Have you ever thought: the Lord dreams about me? He thinks about me? I am in the mind, in the heart of the Lord? The Lord is capable of changing my life?". Isaiah also tells us, Francis added, that the Lord "makes many plans: 'We will build houses, plant vineyards, and eat together: all those plans typical of one in love'".

After all, "the Lord manifests himself enamoured of his people" even going so far as to say "I did not choose you because you are the strongest, the biggest, the most powerful; but I chose you because you are the least of all". Moreover, "it could be said: the poorest of all. I chose you like this, and this is love".

The Pope indicated that "this will of the Lord continues, this desire of his to change our life. And we are able to say, if we hear this invitation of the Lord: 'You have changed my mourning into dancing'", which are "the words that we prayed" in Psalm

29. "I will praise you, Lord, you have rescued me" the Psalm also says, thereby acknowledging that the Lord "is capable of changing us, through love: He is in love with us".

"I don't believe any theologian can explain this: it is inexplicable", Francis remarked. Because this is something "we can only reflect on, feel and cry for joy: the Lord can change us". He then asked spontaneously: what do I have to do? The answer is simple: "Believe. Believe that the Lord can change me, that He can". This is exactly what the king's official in Capernaum did, as told in the Gospel according to John (4:43-54). That man, whose son was ill, asked Jesus "to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death". And Jesus replied to him: "Go; your son will live". Thus, that father "believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. He believed. He believed that Jesus had the power to heal his child. And he was right".

Faith, Francis explained, "is giving space to this love of God; it is making room for the power, for the power of God, for the power of One who loves me, who is in love with me and who wants this joy with me. This is faith. This is believing: it is making room for the Lord to come and change me".

The Pope concluded with a meaningful annotation: "It is curious: this was the second miracle that Jesus performed. And He did it in the same place where He had performed the first, in Cana in Galilee". In today's Gospel passage we read, in fact: "So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine". Again, "in Cana in Galilee, He also changed this boy's death into life". Truly, Francis said, "the Lord can change us, He wants to change us, He loves to change us. And this" He does "through love". And He only asks us for "our faith: in other words, to give space to his love so it may act and bring about a change of life in us".

Tuesday, 17 March

Don't close that door

Lent is a propitious time "for each of us and for the whole Church" to ask the Lord for "conversion to the mercy of Jesus". Too often, in fact, Christians "are experts at closing the door to people" who, worn down by life and by their mistakes, would instead be ready for a new start, "people whose hearts the Holy Spirit stirs to move forward".

During Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, the law of love was at the

core of Pope Francis' reflection, which began from the Day's Liturgy of the Word. It began with an image: "water which is made fresh". In the First Reading the Prophet Ezekiel (47:1-9, 12) talks about water flowing from the temple, "holy water, the water of God, as abundant as the grace of God: ever abundant". The Lord, the Pope explained, is indeed generous "in giving his love, in healing our wounds".

Water returns in the Gospel according to John (5:1-16), with the image of a pool – "in Hebrew it was called Bethesda" – which had "five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled". In this place there was, in fact, a tradition according to which "from time to time an angel came down" to stir up the waters, and the sick "who jumped in" at that moment "would be healed".

Therefore, the Pontiff explained, "there were a lot of people". And that is also why "a man who had been ill for 38 years" was there. He was there, waiting, and Jesus asked him: "Do you want to be well?". The sick man replied: "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, when the angel comes. While I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me". In other words, Jesus is presented with "a defeated man" who "had lost hope". A sick man, "not just paralyzed", Francis pointed out, but afflicted with "another, much worse disease", sloth.

"Sloth made him sad, lazy", the Pope noted. Another person would have "found a way to get there in time, like the blind man in Jericho who shouted and shouted, and they wanted to silence him but he shouted even louder: he found a way". But this man, overcome by 38 years of illness, "didn't want to be healed", didn't have the strength. At the same time, he had a "bitterness of spirit: 'Someone else gets there before me and I am left aside'. He also had "a little resentment". He

was "really a sad soul, defeated, defeated by life".

However, "Jesus has mercy" for this man and says to him: "Rise! Get up, let's put an end to this; take up your mat, and walk". Francis then described the following scene: "The man was immediately healed and took up his mat and walked, but he was so sick that he couldn't believe it, and perhaps he walked somewhat hesitantly with his mat on his shoulders". At this point other characters come into play: "It is the sabbath and what does this man find? The doctors of the law", who ask him: "Why are you carrying this? You can't, today is the sabbath". The man responds: "Well, you know, I've been healed!". Then he adds: "The man who made me well told me: 'take up your mat'".

Thus a curious thing happened: "the people, instead of rejoicing, of saying: 'How beautiful! Well done!', wonder: 'Who is this man?'. The experts, in other words, begin to investigate and discuss: 'Let's see what has happened here, the law... We need to defend the law'. The man, for his part, continues to walk with his mat, "but a little sadly". The Pope commented: "I'm bad, but sometimes I think of what would have happened had this man given a nice cheque to those doctors. They might have said: 'Go ahead, yes, yes, this time go ahead!'".

Further in the Gospel Reading, Jesus "finds this man again and says to him: 'Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you. Go ahead, keep going'. And that man goes to the doctors of the law to say: 'The person, the man who made me well is called Jesus. He's the one'. We also read that this is why "the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath". Again, Francis said, it was "because he did good even on the sabbath, and you couldn't do that".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Irish Bishops in view of the constitutional referendum

Marriage is between man and woman

On 22 May the people of Ireland will vote on a referendum that could change the meaning of marriage in the Constitution. Catholic Bishops have underlined the need for deep reflection in view of the upcoming popular vote. In a statement released during their Spring General Assembly, they indicated that "marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society", stating further that "the union of a man and a woman in marriage, open to the procreation of children, is a gift from God who created us 'male and female'. Reason also points to the truth about human sexuality that makes the relationship between a man and a woman unique. Mothers and fathers bring different, yet complementary gifts and strengths into a child's life".

With regard to the possible modification of the Constitution, the episcopate explained its opposition to an amendment that "redefines marriage and effectively places the union of two men, or two women, on par with the marriage relationship between a husband and wife which is open to the procreation of children". Additionally, the prelates expressed concern that, "should the amendment be passed, it will become increasingly difficult to speak any longer in public about marriage" as a bond between a man and a woman. "What will we be expected to teach children in school about marriage? Will those who sincerely continue to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman be forced to act against their conscience?". Along with these questions the Bishops ask that a way be found to "protect the civil rights of gay people without undermining the fundamental meaning of marriage as commonly understood across cultures, faiths and down the ages".

Pope calls bishops and faithful of Rome's Korean community to be faithful to the legacy of martyrs

A promise for Asia

"You are a Church of martyrs, and this is a promise for the whole of Asia. Go forth": with these words Pope Francis greeted the bishops and faithful of Rome's Korean community, in St Peter's Basilica before the prelates celebrated Mass on Thursday afternoon, 12 March. It was a sign of gratitude for the Pontiff's recent visit in the Asian country and for the Beatification of 124 Korean martyrs. The Pope then called all to fully maintain the faith and zeal, and to guard against the temptations of "religious wellbeing". The following is a translation of his address, which was delivered in Italian.

Good afternoon everyone,

I welcome you. I am pleased to meet the Bishops once again and to meet you, members of the Korean community. I always have in my heart – it still has not left! – the joy of my visit to Korea. It was a beautiful visit, beautiful, and I cannot forget your faith and your zeal. I would like to thank you for this. I ask you Bishops, please, in returning to your country, to bring my greetings to the Korean community and to all Koreans, non-Catholics as well, for they are a people who edified me. And I have not forgotten that day of the Beatification, so filled with people, so full! Bring them my greetings.

I would like to recall only two things. First, the laity. Your Church has been brought forth over the course of two centuries by the lay people alone. Help the laity to be aware of this responsibility. They have inherited this glorious history. First, the laity: may they be as courageous as the first!

Second, the martyrs. Your Church has been "showered" with the blood of martyrs, and this has given life. Please do not surrender. Guard yourselves against "religious wellbeing". Be attentive, for the devil is cunning. I shall explain it to you with an anecdote: the Japanese, during the religious persecution, tortured Christians – so much torture by you as well – then they took them to prison; but a month before judgement, when they were supposed to renounce their faith, they took them to a nice house, fed them well, in a comfortable state of wellbeing. All of these things are written in the history of persecution of Christians of that country. But why did they take them one month before? To soften the faith, so they would find the pleasure of being

comfortable, and then proposed apostasy to them and they gave in, because they had weakened. Cardinal Filoni gave me a very good book about the history of the Japanese persecution. And thus some crumbled and became downcast, while others fought to the end and died.

I do not want to play the prophet, but this could happen to you. If you do not go forth with the power of faith, with zeal, with the love of Jesus Christ, if you become soft – "rosewater" Christianity, weak – your faith will become downcast.

The devil is cunning – as I said – and he will make this proposal, religious wellbeing – "we are good Catholics, but up to here..." – and he will take away your strength. Do not forget, please: you are the children of martyrs, and apostolic zeal cannot be negotiated. I remember what the Letter to the Hebrews tells



us: "Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you struggled and suffered for the faith. Do not shrink back now" (cf. Heb 10:32-36). It also says, in another passage, a verse near the end: "Remember your fathers in the faith, your teachers, and follow their example (cf. Heb 13:7).

You are a Church of martyrs, and this is a promise for the whole of Asia. Go forth. Do not soften. No spiritual worldliness, none. No easy

Catholicism, without zeal. No religious wellbeing. Love for Jesus Christ, love for the Cross of Jesus Christ and love for your history.

And with these two things I take my leave, so you may continue with Mass. I thank you very much for your visit and now I invite you to pray to Our Lady, everyone together, the *Hail Mary*: you in Korean, and I in Italian.

[*"Hail Mary..."*.]

Please pray for me! Go forth!

He gave us back our hope

Pope Francis met with the Bishops of Korea on their visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* on Thursday morning, 12 March. In the message consigned to them he exhorted them to bring back to their country a renewed missionary impetus firmly based upon the strength and enthusiasm of the young. In the afternoon there was another encounter, Mass celebrated in St Peter's Basilica by the Korean Bishops, led by the President of their Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-joong along with Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-Jung, with members of Rome's Korean community: in all, there were approximately 500 people, 130 of whom were priests. The Mass was celebrated in a sign of gratitude to the Lord for the recent meeting with the Pontiff and for his visit to Korea last August which was an occasion for the Beatification of 124 Korean martyrs. Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, was also among the celebrants. Accompanied by Archbishop Georg Gäns-

wein, Prefect of the Papal Household, the Pope entered the Basilica at 4:30 pm through the side door across from the Casa Santa Marta. Awaiting him were Cardinal Yeom Soo-Jung, Archbishop Kim Hee-joong and Francesco Kyung-suk Kim, the Ambassador of Korea to the Holy See.

"When the Pope came to Korea", said the President of the Bishops' Conference, "the country was suffering greatly, as the wounds of the Sewol Ferry tragedy were still open. Francis arrived among us, grasped the hands of the victims' families. He gave hope back to us. We want to thank him for this today and accept his invitation to go forth to meet everyone, Catholics and non-Catholics, strengthened by the renewed impetus that his visit gave to the life of the Church". Don Jong-su John Kim, Rector of the Pontifical Korean College of Rome, added: "The people of Korea were in need of comfort. Francis comforted us".

Morning Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae

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This story, the Pope said, bringing his reflection into the present time, it "happens often in life: a man – a woman – who feels sick in spirit, sad, who has made many mistakes in life, at a certain point feels the water stirring". It is "the Holy Spirit who moves something". Or the person "hears a word" and reacts: "I want to go!". Thus "they find courage and go". But "how often today in Christian communities" does that man "find the doors closed". Perhaps he hears: "You cannot, no you cannot; you've made mistakes here and you cannot. If

you want to come, come to Mass on Sunday, but stop there, don't do anything more". Thus it happens that "what the Holy Spirit does in people's hearts, Christians destroy with the psychology of the doctors of the law".

The Pontiff said he was unhappy about this, because, he highlighted, the Church "is Jesus' house and Jesus welcomes, but not only does He welcome: He goes to find people", just as "He went to find" that man. "And if the people are wounded", the Pope asked, "what does Jesus do? Does He rebuke them for being wounded? No, He comes and carries

them on his shoulders". This, the Pope stated, "is called mercy". God speaks of this when "He rebukes his people: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'".

In his usual fashion, the Pope ended his reflection with a practical suggestion for daily life: "It is Lent, we must repent". One might say: "Father, there are so many sinners on the street: those who steal, those in the Rom camps...", for example, "and we despise these people". But such a person should be told: "And you? Who are you? Who are you, who close the door of your heart to a man, to a woman who wants to

improve, to rejoin the People of God, because the Holy Spirit has stirred his or her heart?". Even today there are Christians who behave like the doctors of the law and "do the same thing they did with Jesus", by objecting: "This one speaks heresy, this one cannot, this one goes against the discipline of the Church, this one goes against the law". And thus they close the doors to so many people. He concluded, "let us ask the Lord today" for "conversion to the mercy of Jesus": only in this way "will the law be fulfilled, because the law is to love God and neighbour, as ourselves".