

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

WEEKLY EDITION  IN ENGLISH*Unicum suum Non praevalerunt*

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Vatican City

Friday, 4 March 2016

Francis speaks of God's forgiveness and emphasizes that the Church does not accept offerings stained with blood

The door is always open

And he remembers the many refugees who arrive in Europe and have nowhere to go

God "always leaves the door open to hope". The Pope added the word "always" to his prepared address at the General Audience on Wednesday, 2 March, continuing this cycle of reflections for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Indeed, he added, "God does not deal with us according to our faults" and he never disowns his people. Because "even the worst of men, the worst of women, the worst of peoples are his children". The following is a translation of the Holy Father's address, which he gave in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning,

In speaking about divine mercy, we have often evoked the figure of the father of a family, who loves his children, helps them, cares for them, forgives them. As father, he teaches them and corrects them when they make mistakes, helping them to develop and grow in goodness. This is how God is presented in the first chapter of the Book of Prophet Isaiah, in which the Lord, a loving but also a careful and strict father, turns to Israel, accusing them of disloyalty and corruption, in order to lead them back to the path of justice. This is how our text begins: "Hear,



O heavens, and give ear, O earth; / for the Lord has spoken: / 'Sons have I reared and brought up, / but they have rebelled against me. / The ox knows its owner, / and the ass its master's crib; / but Israel does not know, / my people does not understand'" (1:2-3).

Through the prophet, God speaks to the people with the bitterness of a disappointed father, who raised his children, and now they have rebelled against him. Even animals are loyal to their master and recognize the hand that feeds them; yet, the people no longer recognize God, they refuse to understand. Although wounded, God lets love speak, and he appeals to the conscience of these degenerate children, that they may mend their ways and allow themselves to be loved again. This is what God does! He comes to meet us so that we may allow him, our God, to love us.

The father-son relationship, to which the prophets often refer in speaking about the Covenant relationship between God and his people, has been distorted. A parent's mission to educate aims to

raise children in freedom, teaching them how to be responsible, able to do good things for themselves and for others. But, because of sin, freedom becomes the pretext of autonomy, the pretext of pride, and pride leads to opposition and the illusion of self-sufficiency.

Thus God reprimands his people: "You have lost your way". Lovingly and bitterly he says "my" people.

God never disowns us; we are his people. Even the worst of men, the worst of women, the worst of people are his children. This is God: he never ever disowns us! He always says: "Come, son, come daughter". This is the love of our Father; this is the mercy of God. Having such a Father gives us hope, gives us confidence. This belonging should be lived out in trust and obedience, with the knowledge that everything is a gift that comes from the Father's love. Instead, there is vanity, stupidity and idolatry.

This is why the prophet now directly addresses this people with severe words in order to help them to understand the gravity of their fault: "Ah, sinful nation, / [...] sons who deal corruptly! / They have forsaken the Lord, / they have despised the Holy One of Israel, / they are utterly estranged" (v. 4).

The consequence of sin is a state of suffering, of which the country also feels the effects, devastated and rendered desolate, to the point that Zion – that is, Jerusalem – becomes uninhabitable. Where God and his paternity are rejected, life is no longer possible, existence loses its roots, everything appears deprived

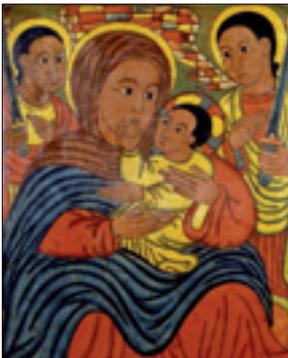
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"Madonna and child" (15th c. Ethiopian
Icon of the school of Fere Seyon)

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The work of the Carabinieri

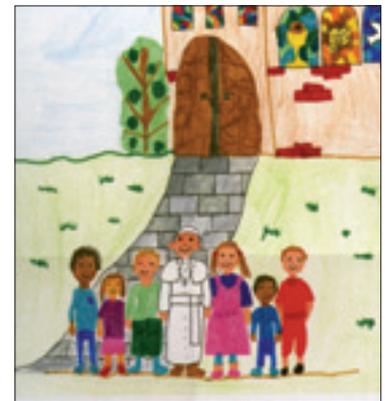
Patience and openness

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The Pope with a group of young students

Kids ask the toughest questions

Last August, by the initiative of Fr Antonio Spadaro, SJ, a number of letters written by children were presented to the Holy Father. They were a series of personal questions, which the Holy Father answered, and the correspondence grew into a book, the English edition of which was published by Loyola Press. On Monday, 22 February, Francis met with a number of those students in the Paul VI Hall.



GIANLUCA BICCINI ON PAGE 7

To Italian business people

An economy for all

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Anniversary of 'Deus Caritas Est'

Heart and compass

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VATICAN BULLETIN

AUDIENCES

Wednesday, 24 February

Cardinal Mario Aurelio Poli, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Friday, 26 February

Archbishop Osvaldo Padilla, titular Archbishop of Pia, Apostolic Nuncio in Korea and Mongolia, with his relatives

Hon. Mr Bodo Ramelow, Minister-President of the Free State of Thuringia, with his wife and entourage

Archbishop Aldo Giordano, titular Archbishop of Tamada, Apostolic Nuncio in Venezuela

Archbishop Jean-Abdo Arbach, BC, of Homs for Greek-Melkites, Syria

Saturday, 27 February

H.E. Mr Mauricio Macri, President of the Republic of Argentina, with his wife and entourage

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

Bishop Carlos José Tissera of Argentina

Monday, 29 February

Archbishop Roberto Octavio González Nieves, OFM, of San Juan de Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico, President of the Episcopal Conference of Puerto Rico, with Bishop Álvaro Corrada del Río, SJ, of Mayagüez, Vice President, and Bishop Eusebio Ramos Morales of Fajardo-Humacao, Secretary General

Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick, Archbishop emeritus of Washington, USA

Bishop Paul Tighe, titular Bishop of Drivastum, Adjunct Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, with his relatives

Cardinal George Pell, Prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy

CHANGES IN EPISCOPATE

The Holy Father appointed Fr Zenildo Luiz Pereira da Silva, CSSR, as Coadjutor Bishop of the Territorial Prelature of Borba, Brazil. Until now he has been parish priest of Santana and São Sebastião Cathedral in the Diocese of Coari (24 Feb.).

Bishop-elect Pereira da Silva, 47, was born in Linhares, Brazil. He made his religious vows for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer on 27 December 1997 and was ordained a priest on 11 August 2001. He studied philosophy and theology. He has served in parish ministry and as superior of the Redemptorists' vice-province in the Amazon.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Eduardo Zielski as Bishop of São Raimundo Nonato, Brazil. Until now he has been Bishop of Campo Maior, Brazil (2 Mar.).

Bishop Zielski, 69, was born in Brodnica, Poland. He was ordained a priest on 21 May 1972. He was ordained a bishop on 7 May 2000, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Campo Maior.

NECROLOGY

Bishop John Conway McNabb, OSA, Bishop emeritus of Chulucanas, USA, at age 90 (26 Feb.).

Archbishop Moisés Julio Blanchoud, Archbishop emeritus of Salta, Argentina, at age 92 (28 Feb.).

Bishop Andrés Sapelak, SDB, Bishop emeritus of Santa María del Patrocinio en Buenos Aires for Ukrainians, Argentina, at age 96 (28 Feb.).

Bishop Francis Xavier Osamu Mizobe, SDB, Bishop emeritus of Takamatsu, Japan, at age 80 (29 Feb.).

The President of Argentina in audience

On Saturday morning, 27 February, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience H.E. Mr Mauricio Macri, President of the Republic of Argentina, who subsequently met with Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, accompanied by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States.

During the cordial discussions, which demonstrated the good bilateral relations between the Holy See and the Republic of Argentina, themes of common interest were considered, such as assistance for integral development, respect for human rights, justice, peace, social reconciliation and the fight against poverty and drug trafficking. In this context, the positive contribution of the episcopate and Catholic institutions in Argentine society was reiterated, especially in the fields of human advancement and the formation of the new generations, particularly in the current economic climate.

Finally, reference was made to various issues of broader significance and interest at regional and global levels.



HOLY SEE

The Holy Father appointed Msgr Maurizio Bravi, Nunciature Counsellor, as Permanent Observer at the World Tourism Organization (27 Feb.).

SPECIAL ENVOY

The Holy Father appointed Cardinal Francesco Monterisi, Archpriest emeritus of the Papal Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls, as his Special Envoy to the concluding celebration of the Innocentian Year, commemorating the fourth centenary of the birth of Pope Innocent XII, to be held in Spinazzola, Italy, on 13 March (27 Feb.).

LENTEN SERMON

On Friday morning, 26 February, in the presence of the Holy Father, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., Preacher of the Papal Household, delivered the second Lenten Sermon in the Vatican's Redemptoris Mater Chapel.

Audio Bible in 954 languages

The Faith Comes by Hearing (FCBH) organization has reached its goal of providing audio versions of the Bible in 954 languages, primarily designed for poor populations and those with high rates of illiteracy. The Evangelical organization hopes to reach six billion people, i.e. 85% of the world's population.

According to a news report on 8 February on Mission Network News, among the 17 new languages that were recently released, bringing FCBH to the 954-mark, there are "three different sign languages that will now be available through the 'Deaf Bible' app". Bill Lohr, head of Public Relations for FCBH, said: "We look at the technology, we look at the translations that are completed, we look at our ability to do recordings and other partners who are doing recordings, and we say that it should be completed in this generation". Lohr believes that technology has played a significant role in the diffusion of the audio Bible. Not only does it make the Bible translation process faster, but it also increases FCBH's ability to get Scripture to people in a language and format that they can understand, he said. FCBH is now aiming to have 1,000 languages before May 2016.

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The door is always open

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and annihilated. However, even this painful moment is in view of salvation. The purpose of trial is that the people may experience the bitterness of those who abandon God, and thus confront the distressing emptiness of choosing death. Suffering, the inevitable consequence of a self-destructive decision, must make sinners reflect in order for them to be open to conversion and forgiveness.

This is the way of divine mercy. God does not deal with us according to our faults (cf. Ps 103[102]:10). Punishment becomes an instrument to spur reflection. Thus, one can understand that God forgives his people, he forgives and does not destroy all, but always leaves the door open to hope. Salvation entails the decision to listen and allow oneself to convert, but it is always freely given. Therefore the Lord, in his mercy, indicates a path that is not that of ritual sacrifices, but rather of justice. Worship is criticized not because it is useless in itself, but because, instead of expressing conversion, it puts itself forward; and it thus becomes a quest for one's own justice, creating the misleading conviction that it is the sacrifices that save, not divine mercy that forgives sin.

To understand this clearly: when a person is sick he goes to the doctor; when a person feels he is a sinner he goes to the Lord. If, instead of going to the doctor, he goes to a sorcerer, he is not healed. So often we do not go to the Lord, but prefer to take the wrong path, seeking justifications, justice or peace without him. God, says the prophet Isaiah, does not delight in the blood of bulls and of lambs (1:11), particularly if the offering is made by hands stained with our brothers' blood (v. 15).

I am thinking of several benefactors of the Church who come with an



offering – “Take this offering for the Church” – which is the fruit of the blood of so many exploited, mistreated, enslaved people and their poorly paid work! I would say to these people: “Please, take back your cheque, burn it”. The People of God, namely, the Church, does not need dirty money. They need hearts open to the mercy of God. It is important to approach God with clean

hands, avoiding evil and practising goodness and justice. The way the prophet concludes is beautiful: “cease to do evil, / learn to do good; / seek justice, / correct oppression; / defend the fatherless, / plead for the widow” (vv. 16-17).

Think of the many refugees who land in Europe and do not know where to go. Now, the Lord says,

your sins, though they be scarlet, shall become white as snow, pure white like wool, and the people will be able to eat the good of the land and live in peace (cf. v. 19).

This is the miracle of forgiveness that God – the forgiveness that God as Father – wants to give to his people. God's mercy is offered to everyone, and the prophet's words are valid today for all of us, who are called to live as Children of God.

In Ariccia from 6-11 March

Spiritual exercises for the Pope and the Roman Curia

Ten questions to prepare for Easter. They are the “bare questions of the Gospel” which Fr. Ermes Ronchi of the Order of the Servants of Mary will present to Pope Francis and the members of the Roman Curia during the spiritual exercises from 6-11 March in the House of the Divin Maestro in Ariccia, a town not far from Rome.

The exercises will begin on Sunday at 6 pm with Eucharistic Adoration and Vespers. The following days will begin at 7:30 with Lauds and then at 9:30 the first meditation and Mass. A second meditation will be held at 4 pm, preceded by Eucharistic Adoration and Vespers. One meditation is scheduled on the final day, Friday, 11 March. “Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’” (Jn 1:38): is the evangelical question which will open the reflection on Sunday, 6 March, and which will introduce the cycle of exercises. In the subsequent days the other meditations will centre on: “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” (Mk 4:40), “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Mt 5:13), “But who do you say that I am?” (Lk 9:20), “Then turning to the woman he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman?’” (Lk 7:44), “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘How many loaves have you?’” (Mk 6:38; Mt 15:34), “Jesus looked up and said to her: ‘Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?’” (Jn 8:10), “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” (Jn 20:15), “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” (Jn 21:16), “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be?’” (Lk 1:34).

During this time both private and special audiences – including the Wednesday General Audience – have been suspended.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors at today's Audience, including those from Ireland, Cameroon and the United States of America. With prayerful good wishes that the current Jubilee of Mercy will be for you and your families a moment of grace and spiritual renewal, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. The day after tomorrow, the First Friday of the month, is dedicated to devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Dear *young people*, may you spend the day in which Jesus' death is commemorated, with particular spiritual intensity; dear *sick people*, look to Christ's Cross as a support in your suffering; dear *newlyweds*, in your marital home, may you abstain from vice and practice virtue.

New Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem

On Monday, 1 March, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II appointed Theodore Al-Antouny as the new Archbishop of Jerusalem and of the Far East. The 47-year-old Egyptian will also have jurisdiction in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Kuwait. The appointment comes three months after the death of Anba Abraham. The Archbishop of Jerusalem has long been considered the most important in the holy synod after the Patriarch.

A dozen white roses for Miriam



Pope Francis left a dozen white roses for Miriam Woldu. The young woman, who worked at the Casa Santa Marta died recently. At 8:50 on Saturday morning, 27 February, the Holy Father went to pray in the Church of Santo Stefano degli Abissini in the Vatican. He brought a bouquet of flowers and, after sprinkling her

coffin with holy water, he stopped to pray for 20 minutes in the first aisle of the church. In that moment Miriam's other colleagues were present, along with members of the Eritrean community of Rome. The Pope expressed his condolences to each of them before her funeral, which was celebrated at 10:30 am.

With the Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch the Pope recalls the suffering of Christians

An ecumenism of martyrs

"The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity". Pope Francis spoke to the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abuna Matthias I, in an audience on Monday morning, 29 February, in the private library of the Apostolic Palace. "From the beginning, yours has been a Church of martyrs", the Pope said. "Today too, you are witnessing a devastating outbreak of violence against Christians and other minorities". The following is the English text of the Pope's address.

Your Holiness,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is a joy and a moment of grace to be able to welcome all of you here present. I greet with affection His Holiness and the distinguished members of the Delegation. I thank you for your words of friendship and spiritual closeness. Through you, I send cordial greetings to the bishops, clergy and the entire family of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church throughout the world. The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Your Holiness' visit strengthens the fraternal bonds already uniting our Churches. We recall with gratitude the visit of Patriarch Abuna Paulos to St John Paul II in 1993. On 26 June 2009, Abuna Paulos returned to meet Benedict XVI, who invited him to return in October of that same year as a special guest, to address the second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops on

the situation in Africa and the challenges facing its peoples. In the early Church, it was common practice that one Church would send representatives to the synods of other Churches. This sense of ecclesial sharing was evident also in 2012, on the occasion of the funeral of His Holiness Abuna Paulos, at which a delegation of the Holy See was present.

From 2004 on, the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches have worked together to deepen their communion through the theological dialogue advanced by the *Joint International Commission*. We are happy to note the increasing participation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in this dialogue. Over the years, the Commission has examined the fundamental concept of the Church as communion, understood as participation in the communion between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this way, we have come to see

that we have almost everything in common: one faith, one Baptism, one Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We are united by virtue of our Baptism, which has made us members of the one Body of Christ. We are also united by the various common elements of our rich monastic traditions and liturgical practices. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. As has often been observed, what unites us is greater than what divides us.

We truly feel that the words of the Apostle Paul apply to us: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26). Shared sufferings have enabled Christians, otherwise divided in so many ways, to grow closer to one another. Just as in the early Church the shedding of the blood of martyrs became the seed of new Christians, so today the blood of the many martyrs of all the Churches has become the seed of Christian unity. The martyrs and saints of all the ecclesial traditions are already one in Christ. Their names are inscribed in the one *martyrologium* of the Church of God. The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity.

From the beginning, yours has been a Church of martyrs. Today too, you are witnessing a devastating outbreak of violence against Christians and other minorities in the Middle East and in some parts of Africa. We cannot fail to implore, yet again, those who govern the world's political and economic life to promote a peaceful coexistence based on reciprocal respect and reconciliation, mutual forgiveness and solidarity.

Your country is making great strides to improve the living conditions of its people and to build an ever more just society, based on the rule of law and respect for the role of women. I think in particular of the problem of access to water, with its grave social and economic reper-



cussions. There is ample space for cooperation between the Churches in the service of the common good and the protection of creation. I am certain of the readiness of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia to work together with the Orthodox Tewahedo Church over which Your Holiness presides.

Your Holiness, dear brothers and sisters, it is my fervent hope that this meeting will mark a new chapter of fraternal friendship between our Churches. We are conscious that history has left us with a burden of painful misunderstandings and mistrust, and for this we seek God's pardon and healing. Let us pray for one another, invoking the protection of the martyrs and saints upon all the faithful entrusted to our pastoral care. May the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten us and guide our steps towards harmony and peace. May he nourish in us the hope that one day, with God's help, we will be united around the altar of Christ's sacrifice in the fullness of eucharistic communion. I pray to Mary, Mother of Mercy, for each of you, with words drawn from your own beautiful and rich liturgical tradition: "O Virgin, wellspring of the fountain of wisdom, bathe me in the streams of the Gospel of Christ your Son. Defend me by his Cross. Cover me with his mercy, gird me with his clemency, renew me with his unction and surround me with his fruits. Amen".

Your Holiness, may Almighty God abundantly bless your ministry in the service of the beloved people of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

Patriarch Abuna Matthias in Rome

The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church visited Rome from 26 to 29 February. In addition to meeting with Pope Francis, the Patriarch also visited the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, as well as the tomb of the Apostle Peter. On Sunday, 28 February, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the Ethiopian community in Rome at the chapel of the Urban College. Abuna Matthias I was elected patriarch on 28 February 2013. According to tradition, the first great evangelizer of the Ethiopians was St Frumentius, a Roman citizen of Tyre who was shipwrecked off the African coast of the Red Sea. Frumentius was ordained a bishop by St Athanasius of Alexandria and he later returned to Ethiopia to evangelize the country. The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia belongs to the "family" of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. This unique Church has maintained various Jewish practices such as circumcision, dietary customs and observing Shabbat. The Ethiopian Liturgy originally came from Alexandria and has been influenced by the Syriac tradition. Until quite recently, liturgy was always celebrated in the ancient language Ge'ez. Today a translation into modern Amharic is being used increasingly often in parishes. Today the Church has 35 million members which includes a large community in Rome.

The Catholic Church's cordial relations with the Ethiopian Church are strengthening. The previous Patriarch, Abuna Paulos I, visited John Paul II in 1993 and then in 2009 he visited Benedict XVI. In October 2009, at the invitation of the Pope, Abuna Paulos spoke to the second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church officially participates in the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. In January 2012, the Commission was hosted in Addis Abeba by Abuna Paulos I, who then died on 16 August 2012.

Together we are facing violence and extremism

The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abuna Matthias, thanked Pope Francis and expressed his gratitude for the "prompt response and cordial expression of solidarity on numerous occasions especially during the recent martyrdom of Ethiopian Christians by terrorist groups" in the greeting which he delivered in English. After exchanging a fraternal embrace, the Patriarch and the Pope spoke in the private library of the Apostolic Palace, then their respective delegations entered the library for the exchange of gifts and addresses. "The support of your Church to our communities here in Rome and others in the Diaspora", the Patriarch said, "plays a vital role in showing our commitment to the care and support of each other's service to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ".

After thanking the Pope for preserving the theological dialogue, the Patriarch expressed his "strong hope that the dialogue will result in building visible understanding about our churches". Matthias I also recalled the ancient roots of his community which has "the very early apostolic traditions, the faith of the first three ecumenical councils". Today "we are facing several challenges in all parts of the world", including violence and extremism which "are reviving against the most precious human life and environmental stability", the Patriarch continued. "In this regard our joint efforts", he said, of "prayer and solidarity are very essential. Our joint call and pilgrimage towards the peace and justice of the world should be influential locally and internationally for the sake of human dignity and the creation of a peaceful world".

At the Angelus the Pope calls on the international community to support refugees

A collective response

And he looks with hope to the fragile ceasefire in Syria

A need for commitment from all nations to support countries in welcoming refugees. On Sunday, 28 February, Francis emphasized this to the many faithful who had gathered in St Peter's Square for the recitation of the Angelus prayer, after stressing the need to convert so as to take up the path of the Gospel. The following is a translation of the Pope's reflection which was given in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!

Unfortunately, every day the press reports bad news: homicides, accidents, catastrophes.... In today's Gospel passage, Jesus refers to two tragic events which had caused a stir: a cruel suppression carried out by Roman soldiers in the temple, and the collapse of the tower of Siloam in Jerusalem, which resulted in 18 deaths (cf. Lk 13:1-5).

Jesus is aware of the superstitious mentality of his listeners and he knows that they misinterpreted that type of event. In fact, they thought that, if those people died in such a cruel way it was a sign that God was punishing them for some grave sin they had committed, as if to say "they deserved it". Instead, the fact that they were saved from such a disgrace made them feel "good about themselves". They "deserved it"; "I'm fine".

Jesus clearly rejects this outlook, because God does not allow tragedies in order to punish sins, and he affirms that those poor victims were no worse than others. Instead, he invites his listeners to draw from these sad events a lesson that applies to everyone, because we are all sinners; in fact, he said to those who questioned him, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (v. 3).

Today too, seeing certain misfortunes and sorrowful events, we can be tempted to "unload" the responsibility onto the victims, or even onto God himself. But the Gospel invites us to reflect: What idea do we have of God? Are we truly convinced that God is like that, or isn't that just our projection, a god made to "our image and likeness"?

Jesus, on the contrary, invites us to change our heart, to make a radical about-face on the path of our

lives, to abandon compromises with evil – and this is something we all do, compromises with evil, hypocrisy.... I think that nearly all of us has a little hypocrisy – in order to decidedly take up the path of the Gospel. But again there is the temptation to justify ourselves. What should we convert from? Aren't we basically good people? – How many times have we thought this: "But after all I am a good man, I'm a good woman"... isn't that true? "Am I not a believer and even quite a churchgoer?" And we believe that this way we are justified.

Unfortunately, each of us strongly resembles the tree that, over many years, has repeatedly shown that it's infertile. But, fortunately for us, Jesus is like a farmer who, with limitless patience, still obtains a concession for the fruitless vine. "Let it alone this year" – he said to the owner – "we shall see if it bears fruit next year" (cf. v. 9).

A "year" of grace: the period of Christ's ministry, the time of the Church before his glorious return, an interval of our life, marked by a certain number of Lenten seasons, which are offered to us as occasions of repentance and salvation, the duration of a Jubilee Year of Mercy. The invincible patience of Jesus! Have you thought about the patience of God? Have you ever thought as well of his limitless concern for sinners? How it should lead us to impatience with ourselves! It's never too late to convert, never. God's patience awaits us until the last moment.

Remember that little story from St Thèrèse of the Child Jesus, when she prayed for that man who was condemned to death, a criminal, who did not want to receive the comfort of the Church. He rejected the priest, he didn't want [forgiveness], he wanted to die like that. And she prayed in the convent, and when, at the moment of being executed, the man turned to the priest, took the Crucifix and kissed it. The patience of God! He does the same with us, with all of us. How many times, we don't know – we'll know in heaven – but how many times we are there, there ... [about to fall off the edge] and the Lord saves us. He saves us because he has great patience with us. And this is his mercy. It's never too late to convert, but it's urgent. Now is the time! Let us begin today.

May the Virgin Mary sustain us, so that we can open our hearts to the grace of God, to his mercy; and may she help us to never judge others, but rather to allow ourselves to be struck by daily misfortunes and to make a serious examination of our consciences and to repent.

After praying the Angelus, the Holy Father said:

Dear brothers and sisters, my prayer, and undoubtedly yours as well, always includes the dramatic situation of refugees who flee from wars and other inhuman situations. In particular, Greece and other countries that are at the forefront, are generously helping them, which



requires the cooperation of all nations. A collective response can be effective and equitably distribute the burden. For this, it's necessary to work toward negotiations decisively and unreservedly. At the same time, I have received with hope the news of the ceasing of hostilities in Syria, and I invite everyone to pray that this break may bring relief to the suffering population and open the path to dialogue and to the peace that is so desired.

I also wish to assure my closeness to the peoples of the Fiji Islands, harshly battered by a devastating cyclone. I pray for the victims and for those who are working to provide assistance.

I greet the group that has come on the occasion of "Rare Disease Day" with a special prayer and my encouragement for your mutual aid associations.

I wish you all a good Sunday. Don't forget, please, to pray for me. Have a good lunch and *arrivederci!*

The Office of Papal Charities opens a clinic under the colonnade in St Peter's Square

Doctors for the homeless

A sign reading "medical-health clinic" is posted on a wooden door in the colonnade surrounding St Peter's Square. It is Pope Francis' latest gift – by way of the Office of Papal Charities – to the homeless of Rome. The clinic, which stands alongside the showers and barber shop which were previously made available to Rome's needy, opened on Monday, 29 February. Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, the Papal Almoner, explained that the Italian Association of Podiatrists will also provide their services free-of-charge because, he added, "feet are the part most afflicted in people living in the street".

The Monday opening was by design. The first day of the week is when approximately 150 people use the showers and barber shop. These services – which opened last year – allow them to change into clean clothes, leaving their dirty ones to be laundered at the shelter which recently opened on Via dei Penitenzieri. "It seemed right", Archbishop Krajewski explained, "to also provide free medical visits. We are starting like this for now, but soon the podiatrists will visit twice a week, and then eventually this service could become daily". "We are equipped", said Archbishop Krajewski, "to help all those who come knocking on our door. It is what Pope Francis wants, and those of us who are close to him in this venture are honoured and highly motivated to make it all possible".

Patients are seen by medical specialists and health-care personnel from the Vatican, the University of Rome - Tor Vergata and the *Medicina Solidale* volunteer association, who also, prescribe tests and treatments, and recommend hospitalization, if necessary. It is "an indispensable service", the Papal Almoner continued, "to the health of the poor who live among us.... In taking care of these people, we cannot overlook medical visits, preventive care and ongoing outpatient care", of which the homeless "are especially in need. That is why the Holy Father wished that, under the colonnade of St Peter's Basilica, a medical center be built" for those seeking care.



women church world women church world women church world

OBRIORAH MARY JEROME*

Hagar was an Egyptian slave girl of Sarai, Abram's wife. She most likely joined Abram's family when Abram and Sarai migrated to Egypt (Gen 12:10-20). Hagar's stories are closely tied to Sarai and Abram. Biblical stories about Hagar are presented mainly in Genesis 16:1-15 and 21:8-21. Hagar would have remained unknown, like many other slaves, had Sarai not sought to alleviate the burden of her own barrenness. The joy of every married woman is complete when she has her own child. Sarai believed that her barrenness was from God and there was nothing to be done about it. Therefore, she attempted to have a child through Hagar, whom she gave to Abram for a wife. In giving Hagar to Abram, in order to have a child through her, Sarai raised her husband's hope and at the same time elevated the status of this slave girl. Hagar conceived and joy was expected in this family of a childless couple.

The joy expected in Abram's family turned into sorrow when Hagar, who was then pregnant, began to deride her mistress. Sarai's pain was unimaginable because, not only did she remain barren and quite advanced in age, the slave girl from whom she hoped to have a child utterly despised her. Her pain is reminiscent of the suffering of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 1). In fact, Hagar disappointed and frustrated her mistress. Sarai blamed Abram for Hagar's behaviour, and she complained bitterly: "May the wrong done to me be on you!" (Gen 16:5).

Could Abraham not resolve the problem between his wife and the slave girl? Could he not have made Hagar apologize to her mistress? This would have saved the unpleasant condition and restored Sarai's peace of mind and, consequently, peace in their family. Hagar was unrepentant, for pride made her disdain Sarai, who in turn retaliated. The details of Sarai's vengeance on Hagar are not narrated. Hagar must have suffered immensely at the hands of her mistress. The house was no longer safe for her, and she left. It was tragic, because the hope of having a child from her was shattered, first by Hagar herself; second by the master of the house who could have settled the quarrel between the two women. He was able to settle the strife between his herdsmen and those of Lot (Gen 13), but his internal family strife was beyond him.

When Hagar left Abram's house, she had nowhere to go; she became homeless, wandering about in the wilderness. Her suffering, which she courageously bore, continued and was aggravated by her pregnancy. She was thinking about her life and the life of the child in her womb. In spite of all this, she preferred to be a wanderer instead of humbling her-



A nomad called Hagar

self, returning to the house and submitting to her mistress. She was indeed desperate! One cannot imagine a pregnant woman alone in the wilderness! Sarai was not moved by her suffering.

Hagar's condition changed when the Lord found her near a spring of water in the wilderness. It was at this point that the Lord intervened, speaking through an angel who asked her: "Hagar, slave girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" (Gen 16:8). For the first time in this story we hear Hagar's voice, replying to the angel's twofold question. She answered only one of the two questions when she responded: "I am running away from my mistress Sarai" (Gen 16:8). Of course, she could not provide any answer to the second question because she did not know where she was going to. She needed divine intervention to enable her to do what she could have done earlier to spare herself undue suffering. The angel commanded her in these words: "Return to your mistress and submit to her" (Gen 16:9).

The discussion between the angel and Hagar did not merely end in interrogation. She also received divine promises and learned more about the child in her womb. The Lord promised her countless descendants: "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude" (Gen 16:10). This calls to mind the similar promise of countless descendants that God made to Abram (Gen 13:16; 15:5). Hagar's offspring from and with Abram would be countless. The Lord later made the same promise to Abraham concerning Hagar's son when Abraham wanted him to be his heir and begged God to establish his covenant with him (Gen 17:20). This promise was fulfilled in Gen 25:12-17 where the twelve sons of Ishmael are mentioned. He was the eponym of the Ishmaelites.

The child's name was revealed to Hagar. A name which is not only theophoric but which also reflects Hagar's present. The child would be called Ishmael ("God hears"). The angel explained the name in these words: "for the Lord has given heed

to your affliction" (Gen 16:11). God heard the suffering of Hagar when Sarai's harsh treatment drove her to the wilderness. She became so privileged in spite of her own attitude toward her barren mistress. However, God hears the cry of the afflicted and saves them as he saved Hagar.

Further in Hagar's conversation with the angel of the Lord, Ishmael's character was revealed to her. The child "will be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin" (Gen 16:12). This description seems a reflection of Hagar's relationship with Sarai, especially from what we know about this slave girl from the time she became pregnant; she was a terror to Sarai and Sarai's maltreatment made Hagar leave the house.

Hagar's encounter with the Lord through his angel was a remarkable privilege. She was aware of divine intervention in her life. This is manifested in the personal name she had for God, pronounced in her condition: "You are *El-roi*" (Gen 16:13), which means "God of seeing" or "God who sees me". Hagar explains this name in her own words: "Have I really seen God and remain alive after seeing him?" (Gen 16:13). Moreover, the name given to this place of encounter sheds more light on Hagar's experience of the divine; the place is called Beerlahairoi, "the Well of the living God who sees me".

Hagar's encounter with God perhaps changed her attitude towards Sarai. She made her journey back to Abram's house and safely gave birth to her male child. It was Abram who gave the name to the child. This means that Hagar communicated to Abram the content of her encounter with God, particularly the name of the child. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. Sarai's reaction at the birth of the child remains unknown to the readers.

Hagar must have obeyed the command of the angel of the Lord. She submitted to Sarai. (Note that in Gen 21 the names of the couple are changed to Abraham and Sarah)

Did Sarah continue to mistreat Hagar? Hagar witnessed the birth of Isaac by her elderly barren mistress when Abraham was 100 years old. She probably continued with her daily work as a slave in Abraham's house. We are not told how long Hagar was away from the house. All we know is that she gave birth to her son in Abraham's house. We also do not know how Sarah received Hagar when she came back and how she treated Hagar during the remaining years that they lived together.

The episode that occurred on the day Abraham held a great feast for Isaac reveals to some extent the relationship between Hagar and Sarah. When everyone was joyful on the day that Isaac was weaned, and while the two sons of the same father were innocently playing, little did Hagar and Ishmael know that it would be their last day in that house. Ishmael was about 14 years old when Isaac was born. Isaac was three years old when the weaning feast was organized for him. Ishmael was almost a teenager when this family feast was taking place. Sarah suddenly disrupted the feast by making a perplexing demand, which became another turning point in the life of their family. She told Abraham: "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac" (Gen 21:10). Sarah astounded the entire family with these words.

Sarah's demand came as a surprise, especially for Abraham who was greatly distressed. Both Ishmael and Isaac were his sons; but Ishmael was the first born and principal heir of their father's inheritance. As long as Ishmael remained in that house, Isaac would be inferior to him. Sarah was threatened by this thought. Did Abraham forget that Isaac was the promised son who would continue the covenant with God? (Gen 17:19). Was Sarah's demand calling his attention to this promise? The tone of her words was highly malicious. For Sarah, Hagar was a slave and Hagar's son was merely the son of a slave girl. Sarah no longer recognized Ishmael as her legitimate son whom she initially desired. Since she had her own child, Ishmael became a slave woman's son who should have no right of inheritance.

There was again divine intervention at this trying moment in Abraham's family. Abraham found it difficult to disown his own son by dismissing Hagar and Ishmael. God encouraged him in these words: "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring"

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Francis meets with a group of young students

Kids ask the toughest questions

GIANLUCA BICCINI

The Pope prays every day for China before an image of Our Lady of Sheshan, and Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, as well as little Thérèse of Lisieux are among his favourite saints. He shared these personal details with a group of some 15 children from around the world who met with him on Monday, 22 February, in the private study of the Paul VI Hall.

The children, ranging between the ages of eight and 13, are students of various Jesuit-run schools in different parts of the world. Through an initiative of Fr Antonio Spadaro, SJ, they formulated a series of questions presented last August by the Editor-in-Chief of *Civiltà Cattolica* to the Pope. That initiative grew into a book which has been published in several languages and was presented during the encounter on Monday. Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle, President of Caritas Internationalis was present, along with several parents and teachers. Special coverage of the event was aired in the U.S. on ABC's Good Morning America on 25 February.

Accompanied by the Prefect of the Secretariat for Communications, Msgr Dario Edoardo Viganò, the Pope entered the room to a welcome of cheers and the children immediately rose to embrace him.

Cardinal Tagle was the first to take the microphone. He offered his best wishes to the Pope on the Feast of the Chair of St Peter and thanked him for choosing to celebrate it with the children, who, the Cardinal said, "remind me of a 12 year-old-Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem when he started asking the teachers questions". Turning to the children, he said: "Today you can address your questions directly to the Successor of Peter, who was very happy to read and answer your questions".

Then began the warm banter that characterized the encounter. The Pope said: "I believe it was St Peter who pulled the children back from Jesus". On the contrary, "you certainly didn't chase them away", Fr Spadaro intervened. He recalled that in May the Pope gladly accepted his proposal for the publication, which was made possible by Loyola Press. Then, he introduced two collaborators at the publishing house, Terry Locke, Jesuit Paul Campbell. Andri, the young student who is also part of the Society of Jesus, interpreted into Spanish, Italian and English.

Soon after, Francis began by saying in Spanish: "I would like to say something to the kids and the adults: the toughest questions I have ever received weren't from professors in an exam, but from children. Why is it so hard to answer a child's question? Because in a child there is something that points to the essential and their questions are direct, and that has an inwardly maturing effect on the person who hears the

question. Thus children make adults grow up, with their questions".

After that there was an exchange of gifts, each of the little ones brought a gift, many ethnic foods from their respective homelands, but there was also a pair of boots, a drawing of a crucifix, along with an invitation to visit Singapore, a scarf, a football, and even a few beer steins. Clara (Ireland) was the first to get up, followed by Ryan (Canada), Alexandra (Philippines), Luca and his little sister (Australia), Alessio (Italy), Carolina and Juan Pablo (Argentina), Natasha (Kenya), William (United States of America), Faith (Singapore), Judith (Belgium), Mansi (India) and Yfan (China). Francis had a warm gesture of welcome for each one of them.

The little girl from Ireland asked the first question, wondering what Francis what he liked most about



being Pope. "I told you, kids ask the toughest questions", he began. "It is being with the people, being close to people, that is what I love, because when you are with an elderly person, a baby, a little girl, a grown man, each one has something to teach you about life and it helps you live your life. And the relationship with the people grows. When I am with people, I always learn something. And this is so important for my life: when I encounter a person I ask myself what is beautiful

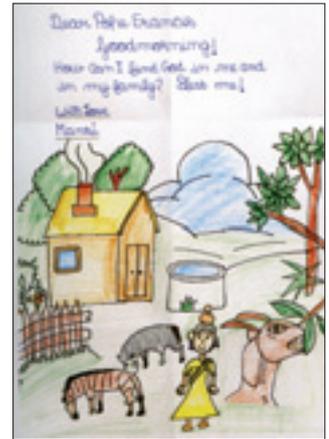
about this person, what good thing did they teach me or what didn't I like". On that subject he raised another question: "Is it better to be with people or be separated from people?". They responded: "Better together!". And he confirmed: "To be happy in life we need to build bridges with people".

To the little Filipina who asked him what he would like to do if he weren't Pope, Francis explained that he used to go shopping with his mother or his grandmother at the market when he was more or less her age. "There wasn't a supermarket. There was a street market called the *feria* and there was a vegetable stand, and a fruit stand and a butcher. I liked to see how the butcher cut meat, so artfully! And so, I used to say that I wanted to be a butcher. Then I studied chemistry, but that was my first calling".

The little girl from Singapore asked him about his favourite saints. "I have many saint friends", he began, "and I don't know who I like best. But I am a friend of little Thérèse of the Child Jesus, of St Ignatius and St Francis. I admire all of them for different reasons, but they are the three that I carry the most in my heart".

The little Kenyan girl asked how it feels to be Pope. "I feel peaceful," Francis answered, "and God has given me the grace not to lose my peace. It is a grace from God. I feel like I am concluding my life here with great peace. I feel good about this, I feel that God gives me peace. And at the same time he gives me joy, for example meeting you makes me so happy".

The boy from Italy asked the Pontiff what had convinced him to accept his election. "I had a great friend by my side", the Pope recalled, "a Brazilian who was over 80 years old, Cardinal Hummes. And when I saw that I might be elected he said to me: 'Don't worry, the Holy Spirit is at work here'. And then when I was elected, he em-

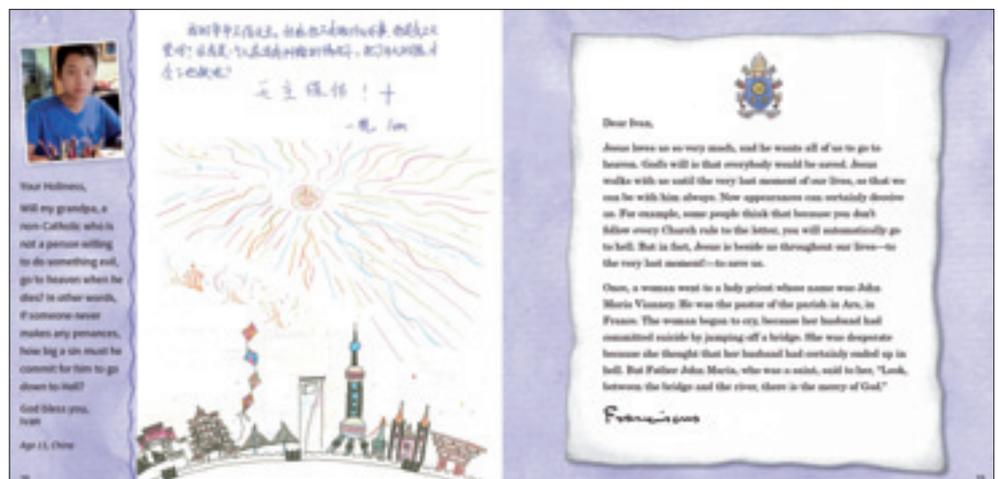


braced me and said: 'don't forget the poor'. He evoked two figures: the Holy Spirit and the poor. That was what convinced me to accept and take the name Francis". The same boy, who is from Catania, Sicily, asked rather abruptly, "And what love do you feel for Jesus Christ?". The Pontiff humbly answered that he wasn't sure if he loved him truly, but that he tries to love him. Moreover, he said, "what I am sure of is that he loves me: of this I am absolutely sure".

The young boy from Canada asked him if before becoming Pope he had been as religious as he is now. "I am an old man", confided Francis, "I am 80 years old. A person's life is not always like this [tracing a straight line with his finger]; a person's life is like this [tracing a series of waves]: there are moments of joy and moments when you are down; there are moments when you feel no love for anyone and you somewhat betray Jesus' love. There are moments when you seem holier and others when you seem to be more of a sinner. My life has been like this [again making the sign of waves]. Don't be afraid if you experience terrible times. Don't ever be afraid if you sin. Jesus' love is greater than anything: go to him and let him embrace you".

After a small digression on Bergoglio's age, due to an error in translation, the boy from the U.S. asked

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A page from the book, "Dear Pope Francis", available at www.loyolapress.com

A nomad called Hagar

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(Gen 21:12-13). It was a consolation for Abraham to hear all this. Thus, he prepared for Hagar and Ishmael's departure. He gave them bread and water that would sustain them for some time. Hagar left with her child. As a slave she could not do otherwise. She had to leave, suffering human jealousy and injustice.

Hagar again became a wanderer in the wilderness. At this time it was not as a pregnant woman but with her son. She who had been silent spoke when she felt that her son was in a critical condition due to lack of sustenance. She soliloquized: "Do not let me look on the death of the child" (Gen 21:16). It appears that the narrator of Genesis 21 presents Ishmael as a small child who was helpless. God heard the voice of the helpless, and the angel of God spoke to Hagar: "What troubles you Hagar? Do not be afraid" (Gen 21:17). This marked the beginning of her salvation and that of her son. God was with them and provided what they were in dire need of at that time. God opened her eyes to see water, thus fulfilling the encouraging words, "Do not be afraid".

God sustained Hagar and her son in the wilderness. Ishmael became a hunter, a nomad. Hagar took care of her son. She was both father and mother to her only child, for she did the work of a mother and that of a father. Usually it was the father to arrange for marriage of his son. Hagar did this for Ishmael. She got an Egyptian woman for him as a wife. The rest of the story of Hagar, whether she married and had other children, or how her life ended, remains obscure. The much we know from the Old Testament is very striking. In the New Testament she is mentioned twice and only in Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:24-25, where she is presented as a symbol of all who are slaves, particularly the spiritual slavery generated by sin.

Contempt breeds contempt and untold suffering. Hagar could have lived normally as a slave under her mistress had she not been consumed by pride. She was paid in her own coin and suffered the consequences of her actions against her mistress. However, God always has pity on human suffering even when we are the cause of our predicament. Hagar was a victim of jealousy and injustice; she also perpetrated similar wicked acts. Her story portrays the tragic aspect of human weakness manifested in hatred of one another. When Hagar was in trouble, God saved her by providing what she needed. God's ways are not our ways. He saves us even when we do not merit his blessings.

**Sister of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ*

The Pontiff stresses the important work of the Carabinieri

With patience and openness

The Holy Father prayed that the grace of the Jubilee would be a time of "extra attention, dedication and generosity" from members of the Carabinieri Corps who work in and around St Peter's Square. He received them in audience on Monday morning, 29 February in the Clementine Hall. The following is a translation of the Pope's address, which he delivered in Italian.

Dear Carabinieri,

I offer a warm welcome to each one of you, and I thank the General Commander of the Corps for his words.

I am delighted to meet with you to express my gratitude to you. Yours is a demanding and indispensable service to the community, expending your energy to maintain safety and public order, in cooperation with the other forces. Also thanks to you, the people are helped to respect the laws that govern a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Your presence in the territory has become a vehicle of the pragmatic solidarity of the entire community: in particular, disadvantaged people can find precious help in their difficulty. So often this goes unseen; I refer to the Commander's words: "those hidden acts that no one sees in the daily service...". This is so beautiful, God alone sees it. God does not forget these things.

Your "Carabinieri Company of Rome St Peter's" works effectively with the competent organizations of the Holy See so as to foster the smooth unfolding of events that, in



the course of the year, are held in and around St Peter's Square. I thank you very much for your work which is placed at the service of pilgrims and tourists. It is an activity that calls for professionalism and a sense of responsibility, as well as attention to people – many of whom are elderly –, of constant patience and openness toward everyone. They are not easy qualities, for which it is important to be able to count on God's help.

The Holy Year of Mercy opens to all of us the opportunity to be renewed, beginning with an interior purification, which is reflected in one's behaviour as well as in the exercise of everyday activities. This spiritual dimension of the Jubilee event spurs each of us to examine our real commitment to respond to the demands of fidelity to the Gospel, to which the Lord calls us, starting from the way we live our lives. In this way the Jubilee becomes a propitious occasion of individual and communitary confirmation; and the

"paradigm" according to which we confirm ourselves is the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The Lord reminds us "as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

May this lesson of Jesus also be a guide for you, who are responsible for maintaining public order, and may it help you

to be, in all circumstances, promoters of solidarity, especially toward the weakest and most defenceless; to be guardians of the right to life, through the commitment to the safety and integrity of the people. In carrying out this mission, may you always be aware that each person is loved by God, is his creature and deserves welcome and respect. May the grace of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy renew the spirit by which you dedicate yourselves to your profession, spurring you to live it out with extra attention, dedication and generosity.

I once again express my gratitude to all of you for your valued service and your collaboration with the Holy See. I invoke divine assistance upon each of you and on your daily work, and I entrust you to the motherly protection of Our Lady, the *Virgo Fidelis*. I wholeheartedly bless you, along with your families. And I ask that you please pray for me. Thank you.

Kids ask the toughest questions

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if it was difficult being Pope. "It's easy and it's hard", Francis said, "just like anyone's life. It's easy because there are so many people to help you: for example you are all helping me right now, because my heart is happy to work hard and to do so many things. And there are difficult moments because difficulties exist in every line of work. Therefore there are both aspects".

The young Argentinean wanted to know more about the Pope's choice of the name Francis. "When I was elected", he explained again, "the Brazilian Cardinal beside me embraced me and said to me: 'don't forget the poor'. In that moment the word 'poor' began to swirl around

in my head and then St Francis of Assisi and that's why I took his name". The Belgian girl asked why he lived in Rome: "Because the Pope is the Bishop of Rome. He's first the Bishop of Rome and that's why he is Pope", he said.

Lastly, the boy from China, the oldest of the group, asked Francis how many times a day he prays and how he prays. In his response, the Pope first spoke about his devotion to Our Lady of Sheshan and his many prayers for the Chinese people. Then he outlined the basic schedule of his daily prayer: "I pray in the morning when I wake, with the prayer book that all priests use, the Breviary; then I pray when I celebrate Mass, then when I recite the rosary. I advise you to always keep your rosary with you. I keep mine in my pocket. In the afternoon, I adore the Blessed Sacrament. Those are the formal moments. But I also like to pray for the people I encounter. I showed you the rosary and I will give one to each of you. In my pocket I also have a Way of the Cross: and when I ponder what Jesus suffered for me, for each one of us, out of love, it

makes me a better person".

As the conversation came to a close, Tom McGrath, who headed up the initiative at Loyola Press, handed the Holy Father all the unpublished letters. Then the children posed for a photo with Francis and they sang a brief song together in Spanish. Lastly, before the blessing, a 'Jesus Teacher' doll was distributed to the children to aid their prayer. "Thank you for this visit," Francis said, "for Jesus, children were like a reflection of the way to the Father. When I encounter children I walk away rejuvenated and I pray that their lives be good. Something that moves me deeply and causes me pain is when I see sick children at the General Audience. Then I ask myself a question – one the great Dostojevski also asked – why do children suffer?". The Holy Father told them that even the Pope, "who seems to know everything and have all the power", does not know the answer to that. "The only thing that gives me light," he admitted, "is pondering the Cross of Jesus, pondering why Jesus suffered for us. It's the only answer I have found". This was also the Pope's message for adults, whom he advised "to stay close to children who suffer and to teach others to stay close to suffering children".



The Pope reminds members of Confindustria that precariousness and unemployment deprive the young of their dignity

An economy of all and for all is possible

On Saturday morning, 27 February, Pope Francis met with members of Confindustria, General Confederation of Italian industry, in the Paul VI Hall. The following is a translation of his address in Italian.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning!

I greet all of you, representatives of the business world, who have come in such large numbers. And I thank the President, Mr Squinzi, as well as Mr Ghizzoni and Ms Marcegaglia, for the words that they addressed to me. With this meeting, a first in the history of your Association, you aim to confirm your commitment to contribute through your work to a more just society that is closer to the needs of humankind. You wish to reflect *together* on business ethics; you have chosen to strengthen *together* your attention to values, which are the “backbone” of training programmes, to evaluate the terrain and to foster social relations, which present a practical alternative to the consumerist model of profit at all costs.

“*Working together*” is the motto you have chosen to guide and direct you. It inspires one to cooperate, to share, to prepare the ground for relationships governed by a common sense of responsibility. This path opens the field to new policies, new ways, new attitudes. How different our life would be if we truly learned, day by day, to work, to think, to build together!

In the complex world of business, “working together” means investing in projects that are able to involve subjects that are often forgotten or overlooked. Among them are, first of all, families, the focal point of humanity – in which the experience of work, the sacrifice that feeds it and the fruits that derive from it – find meaning and value. Along with families, we cannot forget the weakest and most marginalized groups, such as the elderly, who could still offer resources and energy for an active collaboration, yet are too often discarded as if useless and unproductive. And what can be said of all the potential workers, especially young people, who, subjected to precariousness or to long periods of unemployment, are not challenged by work proposals that would give them, besides an honest salary, the dignity that at times they feel deprived of?

All this potential, taken together, can make the difference to a business that places at its centre: the person, the quality of its relationships, the truth of its commitment to build a more just world, a world that is truly everyone’s. “Working together” means, in fact, basing the work not on the isolated genius of one individual, but on the co-operation of many. It means, in other words, “creating a network” in order to take advantage of everyone’s gifts without, however, overlooking each person’s distinct uniqueness. Thus, every business is centred on people:

not abstract, ideal, or theoretical, but actual people, with their dreams, their needs, their hopes, their toil.

This attention to the real person entails a series of important choices: it means giving to each his own, relieving mothers and fathers of families of the anguish of not being able to give to their own children a future much less a present; it means knowing how to manage but also understanding, humbly listening and trustingly sharing plans and ideas; it means doing so in such a way that work creates more work. Responsibility creates other responsibility, hope creates more hope, especially for the younger generations, who need it now more than ever.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* I once again launched the challenge to support each other, to turn the shared experience into an occasion of “greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone” (n. 87). Before the many barriers of injustice, of loneliness, of distrust and of suspicion which are still being elaborated in our day, the world of labour, in which you are major players, is called upon to take courageous steps in order that “being and working together” is not merely a slogan but a programme for the present and the future.

Dear friends, you have “a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world” for

everyone (Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, n. 129); thus you are called to be *builders of the common good and artisans of a new “humanism of work”*. You are called to protect professionalism, and at the same time to pay attention to working conditions, in order to prevent the occurrence of accidents and awkward situations. May your royal road always be justice, which rejects the shortcuts of introductions and favouritism, and the dangerous detours of dishonesty and easy compromises. May attention to the dignity of the other, be an absolute and indispensable value, the supreme law overall. May your commitment be distinguished by this horizon of altruism: it will lead you to categorically refuse to let the dignity of the person be infringed upon in the name of production demands which mask individualistic shortsightedness, wretched selfishness and the thirst for profit. Instead, may the undertaking that you represent always be open to that “greater meaning in life” which will enable it “truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 203). May the common good be the very



compass that guides the work of production, in order to foster an *economy of all and for all*, which does not “keep needy eyes waiting” (Sir 4:1). This is truly possible, provided that the simple proclamation of economic freedom does not prevail over the practical freedom of man and over his rights, that the market is not an absolute value, but honours the exigencies of justice and, in the final analysis, the dignity of the person. For there is no freedom without justice and there is no justice without respect for the dignity of each person.

I thank you for your commitment and for all the good that you are doing and will be able to do. May the Lord bless you, and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you!

Now I would like to ask the Lord to bless all of you, your families and your businesses enterprises.

[Blessing]

In St Peter’s Basilica the Secretary of State ordains Bishop Paul Tighe

Both in word and in deed

Estote factores verbi was the episcopal motto chosen by the newly-ordained bishop Paul Tighe. The phrase is taken from the Letter of James (1:22) which, translated into English, says: “be doers of the word”. Cardinal Pietro Parolin illustrated this point in his homily at the episcopal ordination of the Irish prelate, recalling “that it is never enough to listen to the Word of God, rather we must let it transform our lives”. The Secretary of State presided at Msgr Tighe’s ordination on Saturday, 27 February, in St Peter’s Basilica. Pope Francis appointed Bishop Tighe as titular

Bishop of Drivastum and Adjunct Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture on 20 December 2015. Cardinal Ravasi and Archbishop Celli were the co-consecrators, and among those concelebrating were Cardinal Brady, Archbishop Becciu, Archbishop Gallagher, Archbishop Martin, along with numerous bishops from Ireland.

The new bishop’s motto, the Cardinal said, “is a permanent reminder to all of the interest in the beauty, effectiveness and reasonableness of the word of God”. The bishop “with his exemplary conduct and his teaching”, the Cardinal

continued, “is called to be a sign of divine mercy in order to stir nostalgia of a life illumined by the Gospel and lived in fraternity”. Thus “he must first love Christ, the Church, the poor and the least with generosity and steadfastness, nourishing this love daily with the oil of prayer, charity and faithful abandonment in God”.

Cardinal Parolin entrusted Bishop Tighe with the task of committing himself to “facilitating a fruitful encounter between culture and the Gospel, so that it promotes an open and wise dialogue, because those who investigate reality with a rational spirit, discover the superior rationality of faith, which does not run contrary to knowledge, but that illuminates and enhances the capabilities of the same reason, giving it a light and a higher and greater purpose, which satisfies the deepest longings of the human being”.

It is from “the meeting of the Gospel and culture”, the Cardinal continued, “that unexpected situations and a renewal will emerge destined to involve the practical existence of people. Nothing which is good and true can run contrary to the Gospel, nothing which is au-



Morning Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae

Thursday, 25 February

A name or an adjective

Are we open to others and capable of mercy, or do we live locked up within ourselves, slaves to our own selfishness? On Thursday morning, the Gospel parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), presented in the day's Liturgy, guided Pope Francis in a reflection on the quality of Christian life. Referring also to the entrance antiphon (taken from Ps 139[138]:23-24), the Pontiff emphasized the importance of asking the Lord for "the grace of knowing" whether we are "on the path of lies or on the path of life".

Francis explained that we are in the wake of the reflection that, in previous days, spoke of "the religion

of doing" and the "religion of talking". He drew inspiration from two Gospel characters, the rich man, described as a man who was "clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day". The characterization might seem a bit contrived, but it means to show us a person who "had it all, every opportunity". Then there is "a poor man named Lazarus" at his gate, "full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores".

The Pope analyzed the description of the characters and pointed out that the rich man, "who is seen in the final dialogue with Father Abraham", was a "man of faith", who had "studied the law, knew the

Commandments" and who "surely went every Sabbath to the Synagogue and once a year to the Temple". In short, he really was "a man who had a certain religiosity". At the same time, the Gospel narrative shows that he was also "a closed man, locked up inside his own little world, the world of banquets, clothes, vanity, friends". Closed within his "bubble of vanity", he "did not have the ability to look beyond it" and did not "realize what was happening outside of his closed world". For example, "he did not think about the needs of many people or of sick people's need for company". Instead he thought only of himself, "of his wealth, of his good life: he was given to the good life". He was, said the Pontiff, con-

cluding his analysis, a "seemingly religious" man. He was, in fact, a perfect example "of the religion of talking". The rich man "did not know the peripheries, he was completely locked up within himself". Yet the periphery was "close to the door of his house", but "he did not know it". This, Francis explained, "is the path of lies", from which, in the antiphon, we asked the Lord to free us.

From this description, the Pontiff expanded on the interior analysis of the rich man, a person who "trusted only in himself, in his things", and "did not trust in God". He was a long way from the "blessed man who trusts in the Lord", who is contrasted in the Responsorial Psalm, taken from Psalm 1. "What legacy", the Pope asked, "did this man leave?". Surely, he said, again quoting the Responsorial Psalm, he is not "like a tree planted by streams of water", but rather "like the chaff which the wind drives away" (Ps 1:3, 4).

This man had a family; he had brothers. The Gospel narrative recounts that he asked Father to send someone to caution them: "Stop, this is not the path!". But he died, Francis explained, and "he did not leave a legacy, he did not leave life, because he was only closed within himself".

The Pontiff emphasized that the aridness of this life was accentuated by a particular detail: in speaking about this man, the Gospel "does not say what his name was; it only says that he was a rich man". This detail is significant, because "when your name is only an adjective, it is because you have lost: you've lost substance, you've lost strength". One might say: "this person is rich, this one is powerful, this one is capable, this one is a career priest, a career bishop...". It often happens, the Pope continued, that we begin to "designate people with adjectives, not with names, because they do not have substance". This was the reality of the rich man in the day's reading.

At this point Francis asked a question: "Didn't God who is Father, have mercy on this man? Didn't he knock at his heart in order to move him?". The answer is, "yes, he was at the door, he was at the door, in the person of Lazarus". Lazarus - this man has a name. Lazarus, the Pope added, "with his needs and his miseries, his disease, was actually the Lord who was knocking at the door, so that this man would open his heart and mercy could enter". Instead, the rich man "didn't see", because "he was closed", and "for him there was nothing beyond the door".

The Gospel passage, the Pontiff said, is helpful to all of us at the midpoint of the Lenten journey, in order to raise a few questions: "Am I on the path of life or on the path of lies? How many locks do I still have on my heart? Where is my joy: in doing or talking?". Moreover, is my joy "in going outside of myself in order to meet others, in order to help", or "is my joy in having everything organized, locked up inside myself?".

As we consider all of this, Pope Francis concluded, "let us ask the

Archbishop Becciu on the Church and the issue of abuse in the Church

The rights of children come first

In facing priests' abuse of minors, the command is to "act decisively" but without resorting to the lynch mob mentality of those who "accuse with unfounded evidence". Instead, there should be immediate intervention, so that those who are responsible may be prosecuted and if appropriate, defrocked. This message came from Archbishop Angelo

Becciu, Substitute of the Secretariat of State, who acknowledged the past errors made by pastors who were more concerned with "saving the institution from scandal" than with recognizing "the horror of what had taken place". He also recalled, however, that in the world there is still no other "social and political institution like the Church,

which is committed everywhere to cleaning up and putting into practice all possible methods to prevent other abuse".

In an interview with Gian Guido Vecchi published in the 1 March edition of *Corriere della Sera*, the prelate remarked that, due particularly to the volition of Benedict XVI and now of Francis, the field has been definitively cleared of "excuses or justifications". Instead, "the rights of the victims, of the children, come first, before all else". The Church "is conscious of all this", he affirmed, even if "she did wake up a little late".

In any case, Becciu assured that "we have learned the lesson" and that since the Church is "committed to cleaning up everywhere". An example of this commitment, among others, is the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and the insistent solicitations addressed to episcopal conferences, who are called upon to expedite the issuing of guidelines for dealing with such cases. There is a decisive willingness to "cooperate with civil authorities" and to "encourage claims".

The Archbishop shared that he finds it "unimaginable that any priests could have committed such crimes, words are not enough to say it: abusing children is an offense and a wound that is intolerable to God even before the Church". Thus, Pope Francis "is strict" in addressing this issue, "as are all the people who have taken this problem to heart in order to intervene in an appropriate manner, and also to prevent it".

What remains to be done? "I believe", the Substitute concluded, "the mind-set has to change. We must always accept the indications of the Commission, for example, so that in the seminaries an appropriate formation be provided to future priests. Above all, that they be careful and strict in selecting candidates for the priesthood".

The film 'Spotlight'

It's not anti-Catholic

Spotlight, the Oscar-winning film, has a compelling plot. The film is not anti-Catholic, as perhaps some have suggested; it manages to portray the profound pain and confusion the faithful experienced in the discovery of these terrible things. Naturally, the narrative tells nothing of the long and tenacious battle that Joseph Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and as Pope, undertook against pedophilia in the Church. But one film cannot tell all, and the difficulties that Ratzinger met with do not but confirm the film's theme, which is that too often ecclesiastical institutions have not known how to react with the necessary determination in the face of these crimes.

Of course, as we all know, children are vulnerable, and therefore a common target of abuse even in families, sports, and secular schools. Not all monsters wear cassocks. Pedophilia does not arise from the vow of chastity. However, it has become clear that too many in the Church are more preoccupied with the image of the institution than with the seriousness of the act.

All this cannot justify the extremely grave crime of those who, while seen as God's representatives, use this authority and prestige to exploit the innocent. The film is adept at recounting this detail, giving space to the inner devastation that these acts generate in the victims, who no



longer have a God to plead with or to ask for help.

The fact that a call arose from the Oscar ceremony - for Pope Francis to fight this scourge - should be seen as a positive sign: there is still trust in the institution, there is trust in a Pope who is continuing the clean-up begun by his predecessor, then still a cardinal. There is still trust in a faith that has at its heart the defence of victims, the protection of the innocent. (*Lucetta Scaraffia*)



Lord" for the grace "to always see the Lazarus who knocks at our heart" and for the grace to "go outside of ourselves with generosity, with an attitude of mercy, so that God's mercy can enter our heart".

Monday, 29 February

Salvation in the little things

God's salvation comes not from great things, not from power or money, not from clerical or political networks, but from small and simple things that sometimes even arise from disdain. Francis proposed this meditation during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday morning.

"The Church prepares us for Easter and today makes us reflect on salvation: what do we think salvation is like", Francis began, "the salvation that we all want?". The story of "Naaman's disease", narrated in the Second Book of Kings (5:1-15), presents "the fact of death: and afterwards?". Indeed, "when there is sickness, it always leads us back to that thought: salvation". But, the Pontiff asked, "how does salvation come about? What is the path to salvation? What is God's revelation to us Christians with regard to salvation?".

In the Pope's view, "the key word to understanding the Church's message today is disdain". After "Naaman arrived at Elisha's house and asked to be cured, Elisha sent a boy to tell him to wash in the Jordan seven times. A simple thing". Perhaps for this reason "Naaman disdained", exclaiming: "I have made such a journey, with so many gifts...". Instead everything was resolved by simply bathing in the river. Moreover, Naaman continued, "our rivers are more beautiful than this one".

Francis then pointed out, in reference to the Gospel passage taken from Luke (4:24-30), that "the inhabitants of Nazareth" similarly "disdained after hearing Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah that Sabbath in the synagogue", when he said "today this has happened", speaking of the liberation, of how the people would be freed". The people commented: "What do you think about this man? He is one of us, we saw him grow up from boyhood, he never studied". And the people "disdained" and even "wanted to kill him".

Again, the Pope continued, "later on Jesus felt this disdain on the part of the leaders, the doctors of the law who sought salvation in moral casuistry – this can be done to this point, to that point... – and thus I

don't know how many commandments they had, and the poor people...". This is why the people did not trust them. The same thing happened with "the Sadducees, who sought salvation in compromises with the powerful men of the world, with the emperor: some with clerical networks, others with political networks sought salvation in this way". But "the people had an instinct and didn't believe" in them. Instead, "they believed in Jesus because he spoke with authority".

And so, the Pope asked, "why this disdain?". It is because, he said, "in our imagination salvation must come from something great, from something majestic: only the powerful can save us, those who have strength, who have money, who have power, these people can save us". Instead, "God's plan is different". Thus, "they feel disdain because they cannot understand that salvation comes only from little things, from the simplicity of the things of God". And "when Jesus proposes the way of salvation, he never speaks of great things", but only "little things".

From this perspective Francis suggested a re-reading of the Gospel Beatitudes – "you will be saved if you do this" – and of Matthew, Chapter 25. They are "the two pillars of the Gospel: 'Come, come with me because you have done this'". It involves "simple things: you did not seek salvation or hope in power, in networks, in negotiations, no; you simply did this". Yet actually, this gives rise to much disdain.

The Pope then proposed, "preparing for Easter", as he too intends to

do, by "reading the Beatitudes and reading Matthew 25, and thinking and seeing if something about this causes me disdain, takes peace away from me". Because "disdain is a luxury that only the vain, the proud allow themselves".

Here, "at the end of the Beatitudes", Francis explained, Jesus says something powerful: "Blessed is he who is not shocked by me", who "does not disdain this, who does not feel disdain". Reflecting on the reasons for these words, the Pope repeated that "it will do us good to take a little time – today, tomorrow – and read the Beatitudes, read Matthew and pay attention to what is happening in our heart: whether there is something that causes disdain". And "ask the Lord for the grace to understand that the only way to salvation is the folly of the Cross, that is, the annihilation of the Son of God, of his becoming small". In today's liturgy, Pope Francis concluded, "the little thing" is "represented by bathing in the Jordan and by the little village of Nazareth".

Tuesday, 1 March

The forgiveness equation

Mercy was at the heart of the liturgy on Tuesday. It was the "most repeated word" and thus the focus of Pope Francis' reflection during Mass at Santa Marta.

This concept resonated throughout the entire liturgy. In the Responsorial Psalm we repeated the phrase: "Remember your mercies, O Lord". It is, the Pontiff explained, like "saying: Remember your name, O Lord: your name is mercy!". In the first reading as well, taken from the Book of the Prophet Daniel (3:25, 34-43), the request for mercy is at the centre of the narrative. Indeed, it presents the "prayer of Azariah, one of the young men who were sent to the furnace because they did not want to worship the golden image". Azariah "asks for mercy, for himself and for the people; he asks God for forgiveness". He does not seek "superficial forgiveness", not a simple stain removal "like they do when we take a suit to the dry cleaner". The request, Pope Francis emphasized, is for "heartfelt forgiveness" which, when

it comes from God, "is always mercy".

Azariah "asks humbly: 'For thy name's sake, remember Abraham, Isaac, Jacob'. In other words, he "reminds God of all his promises", but acknowledges the need of forgiveness: we "are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins. And at this time there is no prince, or prophet, no burnt offering".

Here, Francis said is where the second key word of the day's meditation comes in: "forgiveness". The dynamic is the following: "I turn to God, remind him of his mercy and ask his forgiveness" – but "forgiveness as God gives it".

The Pontiff then expanded on a characteristic of the forgiveness of God, whose perfection is so incomprehensible to us men and women; he reaches the point of "forgetting" our sins. "When God forgives", the Pope said, "his forgiveness is so great that it is as if 'he has forgotten'". Thus, "once we are at peace with God through his mercy", if we ask the Lord: "Do you remember that bad thing that I did?", he might answer: "Which one? I don't remember...".

Francis explained that this is "completely the opposite of what we do", and which often comes out when we "gossip: 'This person did this, he did this, he did that...'. We "do not forget", and we keep an "ancient, middle, mediaeval and modern history" for many people. The reason for this can be found in the fact "that we do not have a merciful heart".

Turning to the Lord, however, Azariah is able to "appeal" to his mercy, that "he grant us forgiveness and salvation and forget our sins". Therefore he asks the Lord: "deal with us in thy forbearance and in thy abundant mercy. Deliver us!" It is the same prayer that returns in the Responsorial Psalm: "Remember your mercies, O Lord".

The same topic appears again in the day's passage from the Gospel of Matthew (18:21-25). Here the main character is Peter, who "had heard the Lord speak many times about forgiveness, about mercy". The Apostle, apparently, in his simplicity, – for "he had not studied much; he was not a scholar; he was a fisherman" – did not fully understand the meaning of those words. However, "he came up to Jesus and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'. Seven times may have even seemed "generous" to Peter. But "Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'".

To better explain this, Jesus told the parable of the king "who wished to settle accounts with his servants". Scripture recounts that a servant came to him, one "who owed him ten thousand talents", an enormous amount for which, "according to the law of those times", he would have been forced to sell "all he had, even his wife, children and fields". At this point, the Pope said, the debtor "began to weep, asking for mercy, for forgiveness", until "the master had 'compassion'".

Both in word and deed

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thetically human can oppose Christ who took on human nature".

"During your 33 years as a priest", the Cardinal said, speaking to Bishop Tighe directly, "you have served in various offices, first in the parish, then as a lecturer of moral theology and as head of the theology department at the Mater Dei Institute in Dublin, and as professor of bioethics in various universities and hospitals. You have made the most of your skills and interests in the relationship between faith and politics as the director of communications in the Arch-

diocese of Dublin". "In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI called you to serve as secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications". Then "in June 2014 Pope Francis appointed you secretary of the commission for the media".

"Your priesthood", Cardinal Parolin concluded, "has therefore moved between direct pastoral care, academia, interest in the relationship between faith, politics and culture, and the presence of the Church in the field of social communications, which must present her mission and her true identity categories understandable and accessible, so as to provide a deep and authentic look into the ecclesial reality".

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At an international conference organized by 'Cor Unum' the Pope speaks about charity in the life of the Church

Heart and compass

Charity is the "beating heart" in the life of the Church and the "compass" which orients our lives. Pope Francis spoke on Friday morning, 26 February, to participants in an international conference organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" on the 10th anniversary of the publication of Benedict XVI's encyclical "Deus Caritas Est". The following is the English text of the Holy Father's address which was delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you on the occasion of the International Conference on the theme: "Love will never end (1 Cor 13:8): Prospects ten years on from the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*", organized by the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, and I thank Msgr Dal Toso for the words of greeting addressed to me on behalf of all of you.

The first Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI concerns a theme that allows us to retrace the entire history of the Church, which is also a *history of charity*. It is a story of the love received from God, to be carried to the world: this charity received and given is the fulcrum of the history of the Church and of the history of each one of us. The act of charity is not, in fact, simply almsgiving to ease one's conscience. It includes a "loving attentiveness towards the other" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199), which considers the other as "one with himself" (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 27, art. 2), and desires to share friendship with God. Charity, therefore, is at the centre of the life of the



is his nature. He is unique, but not solitary; he cannot be alone, he cannot be closed in on himself because he is communion, he is charity; and charity by its nature is communicated and shared. In this way, God associates man to his life of love, and even if man turns away from him, God does not remain distant but goes out to meet him. This going out to meet us, culminating in the Incarnation of his Son, is his *mercy*. It is his way of expressing himself to us sinners, his face that looks at us and cares for us. The Encyclical reads: "Jesus' programme is 'a heart which sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" (n. 31). Charity and mercy are in this way closely related, because they are God's way of being and acting: his identity and his name.

The first aspect which the Encyclical recalls for us is the face of God: who is the God we can encounter in Christ? How faithful and unsurpassable is his love? "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). All our expressions of love, of

solidarity, of sharing are but a reflection of that love which is God. He, without ever tiring, pours out his love on us, and we are called to become witnesses to this love in the world. Therefore, we should look to divine charity as to the compass which orients our lives, before embarking on any activity: there we find direction; from charity we learn how to see our brothers and sisters and the world. *Ubi amor, ibi oculus*, say the Medievals: where there is love, there is the ability to see. Only by "remaining in his love" (cf. Jn 15:1-17) will we know how to understand and love those around us.

The Encyclical – and this is the second aspect I wish to emphasize – reminds us that this charity needs to be reflected more and more in the life of the Church. How I wish that

everyone in the Church, every institution, every activity would show that God loves man! The mission that our charitable organizations carry out is important, because they provide so many poor people with a more dignified and human life, which is needed more than ever. But this mission is of utmost importance because, not with words, but with *concrete* love it can make every person feel loved by the Father, loved as his son or daughter and destined

for eternal life with him. I would like to thank all those who daily are committing themselves to this mission which challenges every Christian. In this Jubilee Year, my intention has been to emphasize that we can all experience the grace of the Jubilee by putting into practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy: to live the works of mercy means to conjugate the verb "to love" according to Jesus. In this way then, all of us together can contribute concretely to the great mission of the Church: to communicate the love of God which is meant to be spread.

Dear brothers and sisters, the message of the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* remains timely, indicating the ever relevant prospect for the Church's journey. The more we live in this spirit, the more authentic we all are as Christians.

Thank you again for your commitment and for what you will be able to achieve in this mission of charity. May the Blessed Mother always assist you, and my blessing be with you. Please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae

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"Compassion", the Pontiff explained, is another word that comes easily alongside the concept mercy. When the Gospels speak about Jesus and when they describe his encounter with a sick man, they say in fact that he "had 'compassion' for him".

The parable then continued with the master who "released" the servant and "forgave him the debt". It was "a large debt". However, when that servant then met "a companion who owed him a debt of small change, he wanted to send him to prison". That man, the Pope explained, "did not understand what his king had done with him" and thus he "behaved selfishly". At the end of the narrative the king summoned the servant back and jailed him because he had not been "generous". In other words, he had not done "unto his companion as God had done with him".

Applying the lesson to everyone, Francis recalled the words of the Our Father, in which we say: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". He explained that this is "an equation". In other words, "if you are not capable of forgiveness, how can God forgive you?". The Lord "wants to forgive you", the Pope added, "but he cannot if you keep your heart closed and mercy cannot enter". One might object: "Father, I forgive, but I cannot forget that awful thing that he did to me...". The answer is to "ask the

Lord to help you forget". In any case, the Pontiff added, it may be true that "one can forgive, but one does not always manage to forget", but an attitude of you're "forgiven" but "you'll pay for this" is surely unacceptable. Instead, one must "forgive as God forgives", and God "forgives the maximum".

In concluding his meditation, the Pope considered our everyday difficulties: "It is not easy to forgive; it is not easy", he acknowledged. He recalled that in many families there are "siblings who argue over the inheritance from their parents, and then don't say hello to one another for the rest of their lives; so many couples fight, then hatred grows and grows, and that family ends up destroyed". These people "are not capable of forgiveness. This is bad".

Francis then expressed the hope that Lent "prepare our heart to receive God's forgiveness. But to receive it and then do the same with others: heartfelt forgiveness". To have, in other words, an attitude that leads us to say: "You might never say hello to me, but in my heart I have forgiven you".

This is the best way, Pope Francis concluded, to get closer to something "so great" of God, and "that is mercy". Indeed, "in forgiving we open our heart for God's mercy to enter and forgive us". We all have reasons to ask God's forgiveness: "Let us forgive, and we shall be forgiven".



Church and, in the words of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, is truly the heart of the Church. Both for individual members of the faithful and for the Christian community as a whole, the words of Jesus hold true: that charity is the first and greatest of the Commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mk 12:30-31).

The present Jubilee Year is also an opportunity to return to this beating heart of our life and our witness, to the centre of the proclamation of faith: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). God does not simply have the desire or capacity to love; God is love: charity is his essence, it