Francis visits the Santa Maddalena di Canossa Parish in Rome

Awaiting the Resurrection

On Sunday afternoon, 12 March, the Second Sunday of Lent, the Holy Father made a pastoral visit to the Parish of Santa Maddalena di Canossa in Rome. At the parish sports field, he held a lengthy question-and-answer session with children and catechism students, who asked him about his first encounter with Jesus and about his experience being a priest and Pope. They asked him to speak about some of the beautiful moments of his life and also to share his fears. He was also asked how they might address the lack of communication resulting from modern technology. As a gift, the Pope received a book of the questions, letters and drawings the children had made for him. After his session with the parish youth, Pope Francis greeted the sick and the elderly, and afterwards met couples who had baptized their children in 2016. He also greeted altar servers and priests of the 36th Prefecture, to which the parish belongs, several Daughters of Charity runs, along with their Superior General. He then heard several confessions, before presiding at Mass in the parish church, where he delivered an extemporaneous homily.

On the role of Sisters worldwide

Not counting the cost

A tribute to nuns who work in some of the most difficult and dangerous contexts, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of giving their lives for those they serve.

PATRICIA MURRAY on page 8/9

Interviews with Cardinal Parolin

On Francis’ pontificate

PAGE 6

Pope’s meditation for priests

The icon of Simon Peter

PAGE 10

International Women’s Day

The impossible is possible

ARTURO SOSA ABASCAL on page 12

As the Spiritual Exercises conclude

A thank-you from Francis

PAGE 15

PAGE 4-5, 7

The Pope for this time

GIUSEPPE MARIAN

As the fifth year of his pontificate began, Pope Francis once again drew inspiration from the question of a child who, in one of Rome’s parishes, asked him to reflect on his papal service. The Pope replied in simple and radical terms: “Jesus chooses whom he wants to be Pope in this time; in another time he chooses another, and in another, another”. Immediately thereafter Francis shared a confidence: “I like [being Pope], and I also enjoyed being a priest in a parish, the rector of a faculty and also a parish priest — I liked both callings very much. I also enjoyed doing Sunday school, children’s Mass... I like this. Being a priest is something that I have always enjoyed very much”. The Pontiff’s simple and straightforward answer is striking because it allows the disarming sincerity of his life to shine through. “What God wants. What the Lord gives you is beautiful, because when the Lord gives you a task to do, a job — being pastor of a parish, or of a diocese, or being Pope, a pastor — indeed, he gives you a task”, Francis added, introducing the children to the mission of parish priests and bishops, which is not only to bring peace, but “to teach the Word of God, to do catecheses”. Thus, those who really want to understand Pope Bergoglio must take into account these responses of his, leaving aside malevolent caricatures and “gossip” that is dangerous because it is destructive, if not downright diabolical, in the etymological sense (diāblos, in fact, means “rumourmonger”, or “one who divides”).

Of course, in the media it is not easy to find everything that Francis says, but honesty would require that at least journalists and so-called pundits take what he says into account, in order to form a reliable idea of who the Pontiff really is, and so as not to project images that are actually far removed from reality; especially since Bergoglio himself, shortly before the start of the Conclave, had outlined the profile of the new Pope: “a man through the contemplation of Jesus Christ and the adoration of Jesus Christ, can help the Church move outside of herself toward the existential peripheries”. Thus, a missionary Pope. And Francis the missionary confirms with each passing day, rooted
Changes in Episcopate

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Manoel Delson Pereira da Cruz, O.S.B. Cap., as Archbishop of Paraíba, Brazil. Until now he has been Bishop of Campina Grande, Brazil (8 Mar.).

Archbishop Pedro da Cruz, 62, was born in Biritinga, Brazil. He made his religious vows for the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin on 17 January 1978 and was ordained a priest on 5 July 1980. He was ordained a bishop on 24 September 2006, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Caicó, Brazil. On 8 August 2012 he was appointed Bishop of Campina Grande.

The Holy Father appointed Fr Vicente de Paula Ferreira, C.S.S.R., as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Castro nova. Until now he has been formator of theology students of the Redemptorist Province of Belo Horizonte (8 Mar.).

Bishop-elect de Paula Ferreira, 46, was born in Araraí, in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Until now he has been diocesan delegate for teaching in the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Until now he has served as parish priest in Samcheon-dong, Korea (14 Mar.).

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Bishop Vincent Ri Pyung-ho of Jeonju, Korea (14 Mar.).

The Holy Father appointed Fr John Kim Son-Tae as Bishop of Jeonju. Until now he has served as parish priest in Seochon-dong, Korea (20 Mar.).

Asylum requests on the rise in Canada

The number of African and Syri- an migrants requesting asylum in Canada, after crossing the border from the United States, has increased since the beginning of the year. The Canadian border patrol reported that between 1 January and 21 February, approximately 4,000 people presented requests for asylum in Canada, roughly 1,500 more than in the same peri- od of 2016. Canadian officials have not provided details on the situation of migrants, saying only that "some of them had spent only a short time in the United States", while others had had a request for asylum rejected by Washington.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

We know well that the great commandment the Lord Jesus left us is the one about love: to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-39). Namely, we are called to love, to exercise charity. And this is our loftiest vocation, our catechesis, which he gave in Italian.

The Apostle Paul, in the passage of the Letter to the Romans (12:9-13) in which Saint Paul calls us to rejoice in hope as we exercise charity toward our neighbour. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's passage of the Letter to the Romans (12:9-13) in which Saint Paul calls us to rejoice in hope as we exercise charity toward our neighbour.

Good morning!

At the General Audience on Wednesday morning, 15 March, Pope Francis called for true, concrete love, instead of love that is just “for show”. Addressing the faithful who gathered in Saint Peter’s Square, he continued his series of catecheses dedicated to Christian hope, commenting on the passage of the Letter to the Romans (12:9-13) in which Saint Paul calls us to rejoice in hope as we exercise charity toward our neighbour. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s catechesis, which he gave in Italian.

Charity, instead, is first and foremost a manmade creation, a product of our heart. We are good — as though charity were a secret for — I shall use the words — it is the secret for “rejoicing in hope” (cf. Rom 12:12); rejoicing in hope. The joy of hope: because we know that in all circumstances, even the most adverse, and also through our own failures, God’s love never fails.

Therefore, with his grace and his fidelity dwelling and abiding in our heart, let us live in the joyful hope of reciprocating in our brothers and sisters, through the little we can, the abundance we receive from Him each day. Thank you.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from England, Sweden, Canada and the United States of America. I offer a special welcome to the many student groups present. With prayerful good wishes that this Lent will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

I address a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I am pleased to welcome the participants of the Conference sponsored by the Focolare Movement on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its foundation and I exhort them to witness to the beauty of new families, guided by the peace and love of Christ. Carry on in this way!

I offer a special thought to the employees of “Sky Italia”, and I hope their employment situation may find a rapid resolution, with respect for the rights of all, especially of families. Work gives us dignity, and the authorities responsible for the people, the government leaders, have the obligation to do everything possible so that every man and woman may have work and thus hold their heads high, look others in the face with dignity. Those who, through economic manoeuvres, with negotiations that are not entirely clear, close factories, close businesses and take away people’s jobs, commit an extremely serious sin.

Lastly, I extend a greeting to young people, to the sick and to newlyweds. The liturgical Season of Lent favours drawing closer to God: fast not only from meals, but above all from bad habits, dear young people, so as to acquire greater mastery over yourselves; may prayer be for you, dear sick people, the means to feel God’s closures, particularly in suffering; may the exercise of the works of mercy help you, dear newlyweds, may your conjugal existence be open to the needs of your brothers and sisters.
Speaking with children and young people at Santa Maddalena di Canossa Parish

I enjoy being Pope

During his pastoral visit to Rome’s Santa Maddalena di Canossa Parish on Sunday, 12 March, the Holy Father spent some time speaking with children and young people, and answered five questions which were first read aloud to him by the youngsters. Elisabetta asked about his first encounter with Jesus; Patrizio asked whether he was happy being Pope or if he would rather be a simple parish priest; Sara asked what, if anything, frightened him; Edwards asked him to share the “most beautiful moments” of his life; and Camilla asked how to resolve the problem of lack of communication brought about by modern technology. The following is a translation of the transcript of the conversation.

*Pope Francis:* The first question was: when did you approach Jesus? That was it, isn’t that true? I will ask a question in exchange: why is that each time you draw near to Jesus, you realize that He has approached you first? If we are able to draw near to Jesus, it is because He has drawn near first. He always takes the first step. Do you understand this? Does Jesus refuse to be with us? I ask you...

[Children:] No!

There. Does Jesus await us? Is he or is he not waiting for us?

Yes!

But does he await us like this, or does he do something else? [A boy replies: “He comes to meet us!”] He comes to meet us! Well said! Who said this? You are good! Well done! Jesus always comes to meet us. And if you see Jesus coming from this way, and you somewhat play the fool and look the other way, does Jesus go away?

No! He helps you!

Louder!

No!

You, what does Jesus do? You said it well....

[Boy:] He helps you!

Does he take you by the ear and do this? [gesturing]

[Boy:] No! He makes you understand that you have done wrong.

That’s it. He speaks to your heart; he makes you understand what love is. And if you do not want to hear him, what does he do? Does he go away?

[Children:] No.

He stays. He stays there. He is patient. Jesus always waits. And this is the answer to your question. We approach Jesus, but we discover that He has drawn near first. He has been there, waiting for us. And He waits. And He speaks to us. But he is always there; he is always there; he is always there. And if you have done something bad, does he push you away?

No!

No!

He forgives you....

Ah ... this is a beautiful word that you have said....

He forgives you!

And if you ... You have to tell him that you are sorry you did these things, isn’t that true?

Yes.

And he forgives you. You are con-trite, and he forgives you. But it is always Jesus who first draws near.

[Boy:] He is always in our hearts.

Louder, I didn’t hear....

[Boy:] He is always in our hearts.

He is always in our hearts. He never abandons us. He is always with us. In beautiful moments, is he with us? When we play, when we are happy, is he with us? Louder!

[Children:] Yes!

And in life’s bad moments too?

Yes, He comforts us; he is near and he comforts us.

That’s it: he comforts us. It’s true, Jesus is like this. Thank you, good answer. A good question. Thank you for the question! The second was....

[The parish priest recalls the question:] "Pope or priest in a small parish...."

Do you know that you do not study to be Pope? Do you or don’t you study?

No!

No! This question too: do you pay to become Pope?

No!

I don’t hear well....

No!

You don’t pay? If you have a stack of money and you go over there and give it to the cardinals, will they make you Pope for this?

No!

But if you do not study and do not pay, who makes you Pope?

God.

God. And tell me, tell me all of you: who was the first Pope; what was his name?

Peter.

Peter was a saint, wasn’t he?

Yes!

Was he always a saint?

No!

No? Did he do something bad?

Yes!

What did he do? The worst thing...

He said he didn’t know Jesus!

He said he didn’t know Jesus; he denied Jesus. A terrible sin, terrible! How was this sinner made Pope? Jesus chooses whom he wants to be Pope in this time; in another time he chooses another, and in another, another.... But the question: do I, who was chosen for this job, like it or not? I like it, and I also enjoyed being a priest in a parish, the rector of a faculty and also a parish priest – I liked both callings very much. I also enjoyed doing Sunday school, children’s Mass.... I like this. Always, being a priest is something that I have always enjoyed very much. Thus, which is more beautiful: being the Pope or being a priest? Think hard, which is more beautiful?

The Pope....

Didn’t you understand?

Both!

Both: what God wants. What God wants. What the Lord gives you is beautiful, because when the Lord gives you a task to do, a job, being pastor of a parish, or of a dio-cese, or being Pope, a pastor – indeed, he gives you a task. And what does the Lord ask of you when he makes you a parish priest or he makes you a bishop? What does he ask you? To do what?

To bring peace.

To bring peace. More....

To bring the Word....

To teach the Word of God, to do catechises ... what else? You, loudly!

[Boy:] ‘To love”

To love, to make a community of love, that everyone love each other.

[Children:] To help your neighbour....

To bring peace to the world....

To bring peace to the world: is it only the Pope who must do this, or must we all do it?

Everyone!

Everyone! And how do you begin to bring peace to the world? With your family, at school, with your friend, when you play with others ... always peace. And if you get angry with a friend or with a classmate, is this bringing peace?

No.

What must you do if you get angry?

If you get angry with your friend, you make peace and it all ends there?

Good! If you get angry with your friend, as he said, make peace and move on. You are good! Thank you. Okay? The third question.... Before moving on to the third, one thing about peace. When spouses argue .... At times you have heard Dad and Mom argue about something; this is normal, this happens. There are always things to argue about, are there not? But what must they do afterward?

They have to make peace!

Make peace. And you, tell your parents....

[Boy:] ... that they should not argue anymore.

No. “If you argue, make peace before the day is over.” Okay? This is advice you must give your parents. Let’s see if you have learned it well: what was the advice? If you argue....

[Children:] Make peace before the day...
But are there witches?

It is bad, it is bad ... what? [Children:] To argue...

It's bad to argue, but it happens; it happens. Always. Because we are all sinners, aren't we? But...

[Boy:] Saying bad words and cursing...

Well, cursing, curse words are worse. Bad words are not nice; they are a little less [serious], but they are not nice! Cursing: never curse! Never! Cursing is like this: it is bad, it is bad ... what?

[Children:] No — Yes...

Really? When you hear a lady say: "No, I go to the witch because I have a bug [illness], and she will do three or four things, and will cure me" ... What do we call this?

A lie.

A lie. Lying. Yes, we call this nonsens... because witches have no power. Okay? I said this [because of the comment] witches scare me. What scares or frightens me? It scares me when a person is cruel: the evil of people. But when a person — because all of us have seeds of cruelty inside, because it is sin that leads you to this — but when a person chooses to be cruel, that really scares me. Because a cruel person can do so much harm. And it also scares me when in a family, in a neighbourhood, in a workplace, in a parish, even in the Vatican, there is gossip; this scares me. I will tell you something: listen closely. Have you heard or seen on TV what terrorists do? They drop a bomb and run away. They do this. This is one of the things. Gossip is like this: it is dropping a bomb and running away. And gossip destroys, it destroys. It destroys a family; it destroys a neighbourhood; it destroys a parish; it destroys everything. But above all, it destroys your heart. Because if your heart is capable of dropping a bomb, you are a terrorist; you secretly do evil and your heart be- comes corrupt. Never gossip! Do you agree or not?

Yes!

Be afraid of gossip! "But I would like to say something about this person ..." — Never! Bite your tongue before you say it! — "But it hurts!" — Yes, it will hurt, but never do harm to another person! Understand? Truly, the destruc- tion that gossip can do scares me; this speaking ill of others, but in secret; to destroy him, in secret. This is the worst. Yes, this is "being a witch": it is as if one were a witch. He or she is a terrorist. Okay?

[The parish priest recalls the question:] The most beautiful moments of your life, Holy Father....

There have been so many. So many beautiful moments.... One beautiful moment of my life was when I was a boy; I used to go to the stadium, and from Dad; Mom, came too, a few times, to watch a match. In those days there were no stadium or the stadium, and this was beautiful. On Sundays, after midday, after lunch, going to the stadium and then going home. It was beautiful, beautiful. It was a beautiful time. Another beautiful moment of life is....

[Boy:] Hearing yourself on TV...

No, I don't like it: TV makes me look ugly! [he laughs; they laugh] Have you seen that TV changes your face? It makes you a little ... not like yourself.... No, I like things "live". I don't like that, it wastes time. An- other beautiful time of life is meet- ing with friends. Before coming to Rome, every two months we would meet: ten friends, classmates, who completed "secondary school" to- gether, we finished at 17; and we continued to meet, yes, eath one with his family.... It was beautiful. A beautiful time. And another beauti- ful moment for me — which I enjoy very much — is when I can pray in silence, read the Word of God, it is good for me. I really enjoy it. There have been so many beautiful mo- ments, so many.... I don't know.... I could speak of others, but there are so very, very many in my life.... And I thank the Lord. You too have beautiful moments, or don't you?

[Children:] Yes....

Yes — You do not seem con- vince... Do you have beautiful mo- ments or not? Yes!

Yes. For example, one....

Today.

Before moving on to the young lady's question.... The parish priest spoke of the catechists. Raise your hand, catechists. Thank you very much. What would the Church be without you? You are pillars in the life of a parish, in the life of a dio- cese. One could not conceive of a diocese, a parish without catechists. And this has been so since the earliest times, since after Jesus' Resurrection there were women who went to help their friends, and they were cate- chists. It is a beautiful vocation. It is not easy to be a catechist, because catechists must not only teach "things", they must teach values; they must teach values, so many things, how to live. It is difficult work. I thank you very much, men and women catechists, for your work. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[The parish priest recalls the question:] So much technology that allows com- munication, but so difficult to dia- logue....

This question is beautiful, because today we can communicate everywhere. But dialogue is missing. Think about this.... Close your eyes. Imagine this: at the table, mom, this is my brother, my Dad; Mom, came too, a few times, to watch a match. In those days there were no stadium or the stadium, and this was beautiful. On Sundays, after midday, after lunch, going to the stadium and then going home. It was beautiful, beautiful. It was a beautiful time. Another beautiful moment of life is....

[Children:] Ears.

[Children:] Ears. I did not hear you.

Ears!

And which place does the tongue take? Always second place. Listen- ing. And from listening to dialogue. And also concrete dialogue, because the one that takes place with the mobile phone is virtual; it is "hi- quid", not concrete. The concrete- ness of dialogue. This is very im- portant. Do you understand?

[The parish priest indicates:] Holy Father, they are right here, in the front, the small group that brought up this question.

Good. Do this: learn to ask ques- tions. "Oh how are you?" — Well...

— What did you do yester- day?.... You ask a question and let the other person speak. This is how dialogue begins. But the other person always speak first, and you, listen closely. This is called "the apostolate of listening". Do you un- derstand? This is how dialogue works. Back home we have a saying, that often priests have to "speak to the daughter-in-law so the mother- in-law hears"; and I say these things to children, but that grown ups will also hear! We all need to learn these things.

[The parish priest describes a gift being presented to Pope Francis:] Holy Fath- er, this is the book which contains all the questions, letters and drawings that the children and the youth have made for you.

Thank you for this, because I know each of you did this with your heart, with love. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. And I thank these postmen who brought it: for me this is so valu- able, because this is really a bridge of dialogue, because dialogue is al- ways a bridge. And I thank you. There is always the last one in the mail, this was the last one to arrive in time. It is a right. Thank you very much. Now all together, I invite you to pray to our Mother in Heaven, Mary.

[Girl:] Mary...
Interview with the Secretary of State on the fourth anniversary of Francis’ pontificate

ALESSANDRO GIGOTTI

It has been four years since Pope Francis’ election. Four years experienced with great intensity by the Pastor who came almost from ‘the ends of the earth’, who is putting into action a work of profound renewal of the Church. This fourth year was marked by many magisterial moments and documents. It was the time of Amoris Laetitia and of the historic embrace with Patriarch Kirill in Cuba, of World Youth Day in Krakow, the visit to Auschwitz, the canonization of Mother Teresa and the ecumenical trip to Lund for the fifth centenary of the Lutheran Reformation. In an exclusive interview at the Secretariat for Communication, Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, comments on these events.

Let us go back to 13 March 2013 when Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope.

On that day, 13 March, I was not in Rome. I was still in Caracas (as Nuncio in Venezuela). Therefore, the news reached us at midday when it was already evening in Rome. Obviously, what I felt first of all was great surprise at this name, at the election of Cardinal Bergoglio, whom I had heard about, but who, at that time, was not expected to become the new Pope. At any rate, the press had not presented him as being among the "papable". Therefore, it was a great surprise and the name chosen also came as a surprise; this name “Francis” which was not in the series of Popes and which, in my opinion, immediately revealed what the characteristics of the new Pontiff would be. Then I was touched by his speech, delivered with such simplicity, so much peace, so much serenity, in particular this reciprocal entrustment, the fact that he entrusted himself to the people and asked them to pray that he receive God’s blessing “God’s holy people”, as Pope Francis loves to say. Additionally, it is also the entrustment of the Pastor to the people; of the people to the Pastor and of the Pastor to the people, and all together, entrust themselves to God. And from this emerged this image of the people, with trust and entrusting themselves to prayer, and therefore to the grace and mercy of the Lord.

From his first public appearances, the Holy Father highlighted this very necessity of being a “Church which goes forth”, a journeying Church in the Synodal model, this vision the Pope truly cherishes, becoming established at various levels within the Church?

Evidently it is a long journey, a gradual journey which, we could say, had its beginnings in the Second Vatican Council, the implementation of which Pope Francis, himself, wants to ensure in the life of the Church. I think this journeying Church is important, this Church which is opening herself up: a Church which first of all opens herself to the Lord, a Church which goes forth toward her Lord, toward Jesus Christ. It is precisely because the Church is outgoing toward Jesus Christ, that she is capable of accompanying people, encountering people, accompanying people in their daily reality. I think this is very important and I think that this journey should be taken together. This is synodal! The Church’s journey is taken together, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, a Church which is gathered by the Spirit, where each person is attentive to the voice of the Spirit and where each person also pools the gifts received from the Holy Spirit for the completion of this mission.

The Jubilee of Mercy has ended but mercy continues to be the keystone of this Pontificate, as the episcopal motto of Jorge Mario Bergoglio reminds us. Where do you see the most fertile fruit of the Holy Father’s continuous call to mercy, to God’s tenderness?

I should say that this insistence on mercy is not a personal preference of the Pope so much as the focusing of attention on the fundamental mystery which is God’s love. Salvation history is none other than the story of the revelation of the love, the mercy, the tenderness of God toward humanity. And the Pope has called us to return to this very centre, this source. I think that the Church should seek to be a conduit, to be a channel for this encounter between God’s mercy and the needs of today in his concrete reality, his joy and his suffering, his certainties besides his weaknesses and doubts. The Holy Year of Mercy was truly an offering the Pope made to the Church so that she might become this instrument of Mercy. As he rightly said, the Holy Door closes but the door of mercy always remains open! With regard to the fruit, I would like to highlight two things. The first is the number of Christians, the many baptized people, the rediscovery of confession as a sacrament of God’s Mercy in which Jesus the Lord allows us to experience the Father’s mercy, the forgiveness of sins and all his love for us. I have heard from many people that there has been a reawakening of this sacrament and that many people have moved closer. Let us hope that this reawakening may continue and truly translate into a renewed participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The second is the attention to situations of poverty and destitution. The Pope has shown us, especially with his gestures, this exercise of mercy which is also one of the most urgent demands of Lent: conversion actually occurs by carrying out acts of fraternal charity. And therefore this renewed attention to people in difficulty, to the poor, to the outcast, to those in need of support and closeness. I think there have been many initiatives. I think this too is a dimension on which we must continue to insist.

In the fourth year of his Pontificate, in particular with the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia, some criticism has emerged in Catholic circles, some misunderstandings, if you will, regarding Pope Francis’ Magisterium. How should we understand this?

First of all, I would say look at Amoris Laetitia as a great gift to us. I remember at the beginning, even before the start of the first Synod on the Family, the Pope always used to say: ‘This synod must make the Gospel of the Family shine’. The Gospel of the Family means, on the one hand, God’s plan for families, the plan that God had conceived for families since eternity and on the other hand, also the real conditions in which families live: the family marked by original sin like all human realities. Therefore, I think that Amoris Laetitia has given a great impetus to the pastoral care of the family, which I also have heard from many people. It is really producing the fruit of renewal and assistance to families in fragile situations. As for the criticism, … well, there has always been criticism in the Church! It is not the first time this has occurred. I think that Pope Francis himself gave us the key to interpreting it: that is, it must be sincere criticism, that seeks to build and therefore to help make progress; it also helps to find a way together to know God’s will ever better and so put it into action.

Pope Francis is also beginning a profound reform of the Curia. He often stresses that we all need a reform, we might say an even more important one: “the reform of the heart”. And in Evangelii Gaudium, he calls for “the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach”. Why is this process of reform so important for this Pontiff who constantly refers to it in many different spheres?

Throughout history, the Council has always gone back to it, the Church semper reformanda? It is a fundamental dimension of the Church, that of being in a process of reform, of “conversion” to use the Gospel term. And it is right that it be so. It is necessary that it be so. The Pope persistently reminds us so that the Church may become, ever more herself, ever more authentic, removing those “scales” which accumulate on the path of history, and truly shine with the transparency of the Gospel. I would say that this is fundamentally the sense of the reform, and it is this reason that the Pope insists on the “reform of
The Holy Father speaks of the Transfiguration at Santa Maddalena di Canossa Church in Rome

Awaiting the Resurrection

“We are used to speaking about the sins of others; it is a bad thing,” instead, we should “look at our own sins” and at Jesus, who incriminated himself for man’s salvation. This message lay at the heart of the homily Pope Francis delivered on the Second Sunday of Lent, the March, at the Santa Maddalena di Canossa Parish in Rome, where he was on a pastoral visit. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s reflection, which was given in Italian.

In this Gospel passage (cf. Mt 17:1-9), reference is made to the beauty of Jesus, of Jesus-God, of luminous Jesus, of Jesus full of joy and life. First, in the vision: “And he was transfigured”. He was transfigured before them, his disciples, “his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light”. And Jesus is transformed, he is transfigured. The second time, as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to speak of this vision before He had Risen from the dead, meaning the Resurrection Jesus was to have — did have, but at that moment he had not yet risen — the same bright, shining face will be like this! But what did he mean? That between this Transfiguration so beautiful, and the Resurrection, there will be another face of Jesus: there will be a face not so beautiful, disfigured, tortured, despised, bloodied by the crown of thorns. Jesus’ whole body will be as something to be discarded. Two Transfigurations, and between them Jesus Crucified, the Cross. We must really look at the Cross! It is Jesus-God — “this is my Son”, “this is my beloved Son”! — Jesus, Son of God, God himself, with whom the Father is well pleased: He is completely destroyed in order to save us! To use too strong a word, too strong, perhaps one of the strongest words of the New Testament, a word which Paul uses: He made him to be sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Sin is the most terrible thing; sin is an offense to God, a slap in the face to God, it is a bad thing.... Instead of speaking about others’ sins, we should also like to tell you simply that illness is a cross — the one transfigured and the one that will find in Heaven, and also to see this other face, which is made sin, which paid in this way, for all of us. Jesus is made sin, he becomes the curse of God, for us: the blessed Son, in the Passion, became the cursed because he took our sins upon himself (cf. Gal 3:10-14). Let us think about this. How much love! And let us also think about the beauty of the transfigured face of Jesus that we will meet in Heaven.

May this contemplation of the two faces of Jesus — the one transfigured and the one made to be sin, made a curse — encourage us to go forward on the journey of life, on the journey of Christian life. May it encourage us to ask forgiveness for our sins, not to sin so much.... May it encourage us above all to have faith, because if He was made to be sin it is because He took our sins upon himself. And He is always willing to forgive us. We need only to ask for it.

Special greetings at the parish

The Pope for this time

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in prayer and meditation, what he explained again to the children who, unlike many adults, want to truly know him. “Another beautiful moment for me — which I enjoy very much — is when I can pray in silence, read the Word of God: it is good for me; I really enjoy it”, he said, adding at the end, for those who still did not understand: “I say these things to children, but so that they grown ups will also hear!”

After all, Pope Francis has explicitly invited prayer from the first moments of his pontificate when, with the faithful, he recited the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be for Benedict XVI, then called for “the prayer of the people” for their Bishop, and concluded his unforgettable first discourse with an oft-repeated request accompanied by a now familiar gesture of the hand: “Pray for me and until we meet again. We will see each other soon. Tomorrow I wish to go and pray to Our Lady, that she may watch over all of Rome”. G.M.V.
For International Women’s Day, 8 March, at an event hosted by the Australian Embassies to the Holy See and to Italy, stories were shared of the many courageous sisters around the world who are working among the poor and in areas of conflict.

In Conclusion


4 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 29 November 1993.


7 Pope Francis, Address to the US Congress, 24 September 2015.


9 Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, 25 March 2013.


12 Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 10 April 2013.


15 Pope Francis, Encyclical on the Economy, 2 April 2015.


17 Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, 25 March 2013.

The icon of Simon Peter as "sifted through the sieve"

On Thursday, 2 March, Pope Francis met with the priests of Rome in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in their traditional meeting at the beginning of Lent. He offered them a meditation inspired by a passage from the Gospel of Luke: "Lord, increase our faith!" (17:5). A translation of the first part of the meditation was published in our 10 March issue. The following is a translation of the second and final portion of the Holy Father’s meditation, which he delivered in Italian.

This reflection on a faith that grows with the discernment of the moment becomes more concrete when we consider the icon of Simon Peter as "sifted through the sieve" (cf. Lk 22:31), which the Lord had prepared in a paradigmatic way so that when Peter’s faith was tested he would confirm all of us who “love Christ without having seen him” (cf. 1 Pt 1:8).

Here we fully enter into the paradox that the one who is supposed to confirm us in faith is the same one whom the Lord often reproved for his “little faith.” The Lord usually gives us as examples people of great faith. With remarkable emphasis, he often uses the faith of simple people and of others who do not belong to the people of Israel — we can think of the Roman centurion (cf. Lk 7:9) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (cf. Mt 15:28) — while the disciples — and Peter in particular — are often reproved for their “little faith” (Mt 14:31).

Keeping in mind that the Lord’s reflections on great faith and little faith have a pedagogical purpose and are meant to stimulate and solidify a desire to grow in faith, let us concentrate on a passage central to the life of Simon Peter, wherein Jesus tells him that He “has prayed” for Simon, but He is thinking of Simon Peter’s faith. I am speaking of that healthy dose of self-confidence that makes someone believe in himself and in others; in the capacity to be worthy of the sincere faith of Simon.” Simon, Simon … I have prayed to the Father for you so that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned around and have searched for him and tells him: “We walked toward Him on the water and … he follows his brother who takes him to Jesus. And there, the name change immediately takes place. This is because the Lord asks him for a mission, that of being the “Rock”: the solid foundation of faith upon which He will build His Church. We should note that, what the Lord does is more than change Simon’s name; indeed, He adds the name ‘Peter.’

This fact alone is already a cause of tension and growth. Peter will always move around the ‘pivot point’, going about and feeling the weight and movement of his two names: Simon — the fisherman, the sinner, the friend — and Peter — the Rock on which to build, the one who holds the keys, the one who has the last word, the one who tends and feeds the sheep. I like to contemplate that Simon is the name Jesus used whenever they spoke and shared things as friends, and Peter is the name He used whenever He presents, justifies him, defends him, and highlights him in a unique way as the man in whom He places his total trust, in the presence of others. Even though it is He himself who gives him the name ‘Peter’, Jesus still calls him Simon.

Simon Peter’s faith grows and grows amid the tension of these two names, both of which turn on a fixed, central pivot point: Jesus. Having two names decentralizes Peter. He cannot take either as his central point. If he wanted ‘Simon’ to be his fixed point, he would have to say: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk 5:8). If he centred himself exclusively around the name of ‘Peter’ and forgot or covered up every thing that was proper to Simon, it would become a stumbling block, as happened to him when “he was not conducting himself rightly according to the truth of the Gospel”, as Paul told him when he hid the fact that he had gone to eat with pagans (cf. Gal 2:11-14). In order to maintain both the names of Simon (fisherman and sinner) and Peter (Rock and key-keeper for others), he is obliged to decentralize himself continuously so that he can turn solely around Christ, his one central point.

The iconic moment of this decentralization, when it is put fully into action, is when Peter implores Jesus to command him to walk toward him on the water. At this point, Simon Peter reveals his character, his dream, and how much he is drawn to imitate Jesus. When Peter begins to sink as he takes his eyes off the Lord and sees the waves crashing around him, he shows his true fears and inner ghosts. When Simon Peter begs the Lord to save him and the latter extends His hand to help, he shows that he really knows who Jesus is for him: his Savior. And the Lord strengthens his faith, giving him what he wants and extending him a hand, ending with an affective little ones among the faithful People of God. There is even that of pa-gans, like the Centurion, who have even greater faith at the moment they implore the Lord to heal a sick person in their family. Simon’s faith is more legible than that of Mary Magdalene and John. John believes merely at seeing the sign of the res-urrection in the tomb, and he recog-nizes the Lord on the shore of the Sea of Galilee merely at hearing His words. Simon Peter has moments when his faith is very strong, as when he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. Yet sometimes his faith strength are often immediately suc-ceded by moments of serious error, extreme fragility, or total denial, as when he wants to distance the Lord from the cross, or when he sinks helplessly into the sea, or when he defends the Lord in the garden with his sword, not to mention the shameful moment of his three deni-als in the presence of the servants.

We can distinguish three types of thought — each replete with senti-ments — that are at work whenever Simon Peter’s faith is put to the test: some of these thoughts come to him out of his very mode of being; others are directly provoked by the dev-il (from the evil spirit); and a third type comes directly from the Lord and from the Father (from the good Spirit).

a) The two names and the desire to walk to Jesus on the water

First of all, let us look at how the Lord relates to the most human as-pect of Simon Peter’s faith. I am speaking of that healthy dose of self-confidence that makes someone believe in himself and in others; in the capacity to be worthy of the sincere faith of Simon.” Simon, Simon … I have prayed to the Father for you so that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned around and have searched for him and tells him: “We walked toward Him on the water and …
In every instance when he places himself into a “tight” situation, Simon Peter, given his faith’s shortcomings, always discerns the hand that will save him. He does so with the certainty that, even when he doesn’t understand completely what Jesus is saying or doing, He will make him say: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). Humanly speaking, the awareness of having “little faith”, together with the humility to allow oneself to be helped by someone who knows how and is able to help, constitutes that healthy dose of self-confidence in which is implanted the seed of that faith which exists “to strengthen others”, “to be built upon”, which is what Jesus wants of Simon Peter and from us who participate in the ministry. I would say that it is a faith that can be easily shared precisely because it is not too admirable. The faith of someone who had learned to walk on water without anxiety would be fascinating but it would disturb us. However, this good-friend kind of faith, mindful of its limitations and fully confiding in Jesus, elicits sympathy and — and this is its grace — it strengthens us!

b) Jesus’ prayer and the devil’s sieve

In the central passage from Luke that we have taken as our guide, we can see what produces the devil’s sieve in Simon Peter’s character and how Jesus prays that his weakness, even his sin, be transformed into grace not only for him but also for the whole community distance us. However, this good-friend kind of faith, mindful of its limitations and fully confiding in Jesus, elicits sympathy and — and this is its grace — it strengthens us!

Let us concentrate on the word “sieve” (ἰνώνευς: to sift grain), which evokes the image of the grain that moves to the upper part of the vessel, thanks to which, in the end, one can discern between what comes from the good Spirit and what comes from the bad spirit. In this sense, the one who sifts — the one who lays claim to the power to sift — is the devil. The Lord does not impede him, but, taking advantage of the challenge, directs His prayer to the Father, asking Him to strengthen Simon Peter’s heart. He prays that Peter “not fall into temptation”. The devil, however, does everything he could to protect his own during this process. Nevertheless, He cannot prevent one from being tempted by the devil who attacks the weakest part of each one. In this sort of battle — which God does not directly cause, but neither does He impede it — Paul tells us that the Lord sees to it that we are not tempted beyond our strength (cf. 1 Cor 10:13).

The fact that the Lord explicitly says that He is praying for Simon is extremely important, because the devil’s most insidious temptation is to make us feel — in the midst of some particular trial — that Jesus abandoned us, that He has left us alone in some way and has failed to help us as He should. The Lord himself experienced and overcame this temptation, first in the garden and then on the cross, by commanding himself to the Father when He felt abandoned. It is precisely in this moment of faith that we need to be strengthened and comforted. The Lord, who had learned to walk on water in the middle of a storm. Rather, He fears the [disciples]’ discussion about who is the greatest among them. It is in this context that Jesus tells Simon Peter that the devil has asked for permission to sift him. We can imagine that the sifting began precisely during the discussion about who would betray Jesus, which then led to the discussion about who was the greatest among them. The entire passage that follows the institution of the Eucharist in Luke’s Gospel is a sieve: discussions, predictions of betrayal, the offering of swords (cf. 22:54-53). Simon Peter’s faith is sifted through the tensions among the desire to be loyal, to defend Jesus, to believe that he will save him. He does so with the certainty that, even when he doesn’t understand completely what Jesus is saying or doing, He will make him say: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). Humanly speaking, the awareness of having “little faith”, together with the humility to allow oneself to be helped by someone who knows how and is able to help, constitutes that healthy dose of self-confidence in which is implanted the seed of that faith which exists “to strengthen others”, “to be built upon”, which is what Jesus wants of Simon Peter and from us who participate in the ministry. I would say that it is a faith that can be easily shared precisely because it is not too admirable. The faith of someone who had learned to walk on water without anxiety would be fascinating but it would disturb us. However, this good-friend kind of faith, mindful of its limitations and fully confiding in Jesus, elicits sympathy and — and this is its grace — it strengthens us!

Just as He took upon himself the humble task of washing His disciples’ feet, just as He took care to console His friends after the Resurrection, in the same way, with this prayer for the strength of Simon Peter’s faith, He also strengthens the faith of all of us: this is something the Lord takes upon himself personally. We must be moved by this prayer — the prayer the Lord once made and continues to make as He “is at the right hand of God, and indelibly intercedes for two types of creatures, namely Joseph and the Virgin Mary, His mother” (cf. Jn 17:24). This is the origin in an act of spiritual pride that is born from the arrogance of a perfect creature, that is, more perfect than the angels (cf. Lk 22:24-27). Simon Peter, the Lord fears neither his fragility nor his fear of walking on water in the middle of a storm. Rather, He fears the [disciples]’ discussion about who is the greatest among them.
would like to thank Voices of Faith and the Jesuit Refugee Service for inviting me to celebrate International Women’s Day with you and all of those gathered here today. I take this opportunity to show my gratitude to the women who will be speaking today, especially those who are making a difference in their families and communities, especially in the most remote corners of the world. These are difficult times in our world, and we need to stand and work together as women and men of faith.

I believe that the global theme for this year’s celebration of International Women’s Day is Be Bold for Change. Here in Vatican City, physically at the center of the Church, Voices of Faith and JRS seek to be “Making the Impossible Possible.” Especially here in Rome, that is a bold change! I would like to reflect on what making the impossible possible means to me as the leader of the Society of Jesus, as a citizen of the world, and as a member of the Catholic Church. We need to have the faith that gives the audacity to seek the impossible, as nothing is impossible for God. The faith of Mary that opened her heart as a woman to the possibility of something new: to become the Mother of God’s son.

JRS: Resilience

As you may be aware, I come from Latin America, a continent with millions of displaced people. With almost 7 million, Colombia has the largest number of internally displaced people in the world, and a disproportionate number of them are women and children. I served at the border between Colombia and my native Venezuela for 10 years. I have seen firsthand the suffering of those forced to abandon everything to save their lives.

In Colombia, for example, women and girls are among the most vulnerable due to widespread violence caused by decades of conflict. They are exposed to armed recruitment and are likely to fall victim to one form of exploitation or another, ranging from modern day slavery, to sex and human trafficking. Many of them flee to neighboring countries, knowing that they often find themselves on their own in efforts to support their families. I have also witnessed women’s resilience. Despite this traumatic reality, women often find their way not just to survive, but also to overcome all the difficulties of exile and forced migration. Resilience is what enables us to move forward and think of the future. Resilience is essential for making the impossible possible. Let me offer an example.

At the Venezuelan-Colombian border, the Jesuit Refugee Service has been present for more than ten years. During this time, JRS has brought refugee women from Colombia together by using their artistic expression as a starting point for rediscovering resilience.

While expressing themselves creatively through art, women also share their experiences and create a network of support to improve their psychosocial well-being. This healing environment is a place for listening and coming together—in other words, resilience. Resilience empowers women and ultimately results in hope and the possibility of reconciliation with the past, with those who have harmed them, and with those where they now live. Reconciliation requires courage, and too often, even in 2017, women’s courage, women’s resilience, is unrecognized and undervalued. By building human connections, resilience reconnects the communal fabric. Some may say such resilience is impossible to discover: JRS and Voices of Faith say otherwise.

The World: Collaboration

As a member of the human community, each of us is likely appalled at the situation of our world. Human displacement has hit an all-time high, representing incredible human suffering around the world. Ongoing conflicts are at the root of most of this forced exile. There are more than 65 million forcibly displaced people among us: one in every 113 people globally is now an asylum-seeker, an internally displaced person, or a refugee.

We have to think about the ways that we, as the human community can respond. I cannot put enough emphasis on this need for collaboration between women and men. I believe that only together we can achieve what today seems impossible: a humanity reconciled in justice, living in peace in a common house well kept, where there is room for everyone because we recognize that we are sisters and brothers, son and daughters of the same God who is Mother and Father of us all.

We need to collaborate, support and learn from one another. It already seems impossible to imagine peace in places like Central African Republic, or South Sudan, or Colombia. Can we have the audacity to dream that women and men working together will bring peace to these countries? I think these impossibilities can come closer to reality if women play a greater role in the conversation.

I am not surprised that Angela Merkel has been the most courageous and visionary leader in Europe during this time of phenomenal forced migration. She had the compassion to look at those who were in need, and the vision to see that they would make a contribution to Germany and Europe.

Another extraordinary leader is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the President of Liberia. Through her single-minded dedication and vision, she has brought peace and reconciliation to her war-torn country in a way that most men thought would be impossible.

At the same time, the widespread reality is that women are not paid for the work they do, or are paid less than men for the same work. In the West, women earn on average 70 cents for each dollar or Euro a man earns. The gap grows larger in developing areas of the world.

Many of us are looking at the world through the prism of xenophobia and narrow-mindedness these days, a prism which seems to feed on discord and marginalization. In the Jesuit magazine America, political commentator Cokie Roberts, the daughter of two former members of the US Congress, puts the reality succinctly: “...Congress needs more women. Then maybe, just maybe, Washington would work again.”

We can listen carefully to the experience of women in the public sphere, hear how they work together, and be inspired by their courage. These are stories of doing the impossible.

The Catholic Church: inclusion

The role of women in the Church can be, and has been, described in many ways: keepers of the faith, the backbone of the Church, the image of Mary alive among us. We Jesuits are deeply aware of the roles that women play in our ministries: lay and religious women serve as presidents and headmistresses, retreat center directors, teachers, and every possible role one can think of. As you probably know, the Spiritual Exercises, the foundation of Jesuit spirituality, were first developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola before the Jesuits were founded. Our spirituality is open to all women and men who want to become women and men with others and for others.

In the broader Church, there are contrary currents about the role of women at this time. As stated by Pope Francis, women play a fundamental role in passing on the faith and are a daily source of strength in a society that carries this
Shadan and Nagham’s eyes light up when they think back to the days spent hiking and camping with Fr Frans Van der Lugt in their native Homs, Syria. The young sisters met the charismatic Dutch Jesuit, a long-time Homs resident, some 15 years ago. Though Orthodox, Shadan explained, “I believe I was closer to the Jesuits because of Fr Frans” who ran a home for disabled youth and often took young people – Muslims and Christians alike – on spiritual retreats, teaching them mutual respect and hope.

But that all changed with the eruption of the Arab Spring, the war that soon engulfed Homs and all of Syria, and the murder of 75-year-old Fr Frans by a lone gunman in April 2014, in what appeared to have been a targeted assassination.

Later, at the General Audience in Rome, Pope Francis recalled his “Jesus brother”, saying “his brutal slaying filled me with profound pain and made me think again about the many people who are suffering and dying in that martyred country, my beloved Syria”.

Fr Frans had refused to abandon the besieged city when, earlier that year, a U.N.-brokered ceasefire allowed some 1,400 starving residents to leave.

It was against this background that I met Shadan and Nagham in the Vatican on International Women’s Day, 8 March, where they told their story at the four annual Voices of Faith event, “Stirring the Waters: Making the Impossible Possible”, organized by the Field Goetz Foundation.

And their journey to the Vatican and first, to Europe, had proved indeed to be an impossible one – one that took boundless faith and immense courage – a journey on which the sisters drew hope and inspiration from their beloved Fr Frans.

Nagham told me of the anger she felt as the bombs were falling and as the shots rang out in Homs: “In his efforts with the Syrians shooting at each other”. Where once the minority Christian and Alawite communities lived in harmony with the Muslim Sunni majority in Homs, celebrating in each other’s religious feasts, “all of a sudden, we started to be afraid of each other, of neighbours”. Shadan said: “We used to be neighbours, friends, colleagues, and all of a sudden, we couldn’t trust the taxi driver. Everything was really upside down”.

The only Christians in their class at school, the girls counted many Muslims among their closest friends. They continue to stay in touch. But Islamic extremism had begun to seep into Syrian communities like Homs. Since the war erupted, Nagham said, “there has been no chance for dialogue”, saying “the reason the war is open, the war somehow could not change him”. The sisters fled Homs as the violence escalated, making their way with their mother and brother first to Damascus and later, with fighting raging around the capital, to the coastal region of Tartus, from which, again, they had to flee.

Finally, in August 2015, together with Nagham’s new husband, the couple decided to attempt to reach Europe, leaving on what was to become a dramatic journey to Lebanon, Turkey, the Balkans, Hungary, Austria and Germany. Nagham cringed as she remembered being “treated like animals” by the smugglers who had arranged their passage to Greece, the harrowing trip on a smoky boat which left Turkey in the dark of night. Built to hold thirty, the boat was filling with terrified passengers, almost none of whom knew how to swim.

“IT was a dangerous journey that eventually took them to safety and to a new home in Ghent, Belgium.

But Shadan and Nagham recall that even during their dark voyage on that terrifyingly crowded boat, the sisters still taught them “how to start from the inside”. “All the spiritual basis that we have, we learned from him”, said Shadan.

The sisters carried these spiritual lessons with them when they began counseling with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) in Syria: helping children traumatized by the conflict “to deal with all that horrible things they’ve been through”, Nagham told me.

The programme has been so successful that it’s been extended to women refugees. The impact on the JRS’s female refugees, some consumed by resentment, was immediate. The women’s sons and husbands would come to us, Nagham laughed, asking: “what are you doing to my mother [or wife] in those sessions? She is so different ... so relaxed ... Could you please [continue what you’re doing]?”

As the war in Syria marks its fifth anniversary this March, it leaves in its wake more than 250,000 dead, countless rounded millions of refugees and some 18 million people displaced.

What will it take, ask, to stop what seems to be a never-ending cycle of revenge and hatred? For Nagham, the answer will come when people recognize the differences between Muslims and Christians, only what unites them. “People need to believe that they are accepted [as they are] and they don’t have to be someone else to be loved or accepted”, she said. You have to “solve a problem, something that is possible that you’re doing”.

In the “Life-skills” programme they taught in Syria and now continue among Iraqi, Afghan and Syrian refugees, the sisters help children to realize that they can step out of the spiral of despair, anger and violence into “a peaceful, non-violent way”. Through games, activities and watching how they frame to them how “from the inside”, they can take charge, and resolve problems themselves rather than rely on help from the “outside”. Smiling, Nagham said the children end up seeing that they are the masters of their feelings and hopes. When they are angry, “they discover how they can calm themselves” and “find a solution to a problem, something always depending on others” – critical skills amid the chaos of conflict or adapting to a life in a strange country.

Nagham and Shadan, photo by Wolfgang Schmidt

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

faith forward and renews it. Church teaching certainly promotes the role of women within the family, but it also stresses the need for their contribution in the Church and in public life. It draws upon the text of Genesis, which speaks of men and women created in the image of God and the prophetic parables of Jesus in his relationship with women.

Pope Francis has been quite outspoken about women in making decisions and holding responsibilities in the church. He has also created a “Study Commission on the Women’s Diaconate” to explore the history and role of women in this church structure.

But if we are honest, we acknowledge that the fullness of women’s participation in the church has not yet arrived. That inclusion, which would bring the gifts of resilience and collaboration even more deeply into the Church, remains stymied on many fronts. One aspect has been mentioned by the Pope: we have to work harder to develop a profound theology of women. I would add that an ecclesiology – the study of the Church ... that includes women is equally needed if we are to work harder to develop a profound theology of women. I would add that an ecclesiology – the study of the Church – that includes women is equally needed if we are to work harder to develop a profound theology of women.

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But if we are honest, we acknowledge that the fullness of women’s participation in the church has not yet arrived. That inclusion, which would bring the gifts of resilience and collaboration even more deeply into the Church, remains stymied on many fronts. One aspect has been mentioned by the Pope: we have to work harder to develop a profound theology of women. I would add that an ecclesiology – the study of the Church ... that includes women is equally needed if we are to work harder to develop a profound theology of women.
with the look that made Simon Peter weep so bitterly (cf. Lk 22:62).

In this question-and-answer sequence, we can see the Lord's way of proceeding: He begins with something good — which everyone recognized and which made Simon Peter happy — “Do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15) — and then He confirms it and simplifies it into simply: “Do you love me?” (v. 16), which leaves any desire for grandeur and rivalry — and finally finishing with: “Do you love me as a friend?” (cf. v. 17), which is what Simon Peter desired most and which was evidently most dear to Jesus' heart. If it is this love of friendship, then there is no reason for any type of reproach or correction in this love: friendship is friendship and it is the highest value that corrects and improves all the rest, without any need to speak of the "why".

With this greatest temptation the devil puts before Simon Peter is this: to put into his head that he is now a friend of Jesus because he has betrayed Him. But the Lord is faithful. Always. And He renews His fidelity again and again. "If we are faithless he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13), as Saint Paul says to Timothy, his son in the faith. Friendship possesses this grace: such that one friend who is more faithful than another can strengthen the faithfulness of the other who lacks it. And no one has more power to make his friends faithful than Jesus. It is in this faith — Simon Peter's faith in Jesus as a faithful friend — that he is confirmed and sent to confess. We are then told: "Be thankful, you are no longer enemies, but brothers. As if to tell him — as our Lord says too, when He insists on the "reform of the heart": it is not the heart that needs reform, but the heart. And therefore the Pope must call on the conscience of the Curia there have already been various transformations, to renewal — starts from the heart, everything begins internally. And therefore the Pope rightly insists on this. I would like to say that it is important, as he says too, when he insist on the "reform of the heart": it is not the functional parameters that should guide this reform but, indeed, more profoundly, the parameters of an authentic return to God and an authentic manifestation of the true nature of the Church.

Lastly, Your Eminence, you are the Holy Father's closest collaborator. What has been at Pope Francis' side in these years perhaps given to you, first as a Christian, and even more so as Secretary of State?

Truly I thank the Lord! What impresses me about Pope Francis is precisely this reading of faith in things, situations, from which I believe comes a profound serenity. He has also said it many times but I experience it precisely in my current work, the apostolic and contemplative serenity for which, faced with situations, even the most difficult ones, this capacity, this calm, this serenity, to know that things are in God's hands and therefore to proceed with strength, to proceed with courage. And I would say that this also helps me a great deal in carrying out my responsibilities and my role.
Compassion and the voice of women

Pope Francis and members of the Roman Curia concluded their 6-day Lenten retreat at the Casa del Divino Maestro in Ariccia on Friday, 10 March. Fr Giulio Michelini, OFM, led the meditations for the Spiritual Exercises throughout the week. In the final day of the retreat, he noted that women are omnipresent in Christ’s Passion as presented in the Gospel of Matthew, subtly making their presence felt within the voices heard. This is one of the themes which Fr Michelini presented among the last of his meditations. In this Gospel, women in this Gospel, he suggested, are asking that “their words in the Church today not be ignored”.

The sixth meditation, on Wednesday afternoon, 8 March, drawn from Matthew, 27:11-12, Fr Michelini said, was co-written with an Italian lay couple with whom he has collaborated in ministry over the years. The authors of several books offer a unique reading of the Bible, he noted, adding that “the reading and exegesis of Scripture are not the prerogative of the community, and that “couples and families must be helped to practice it: somehow we must not to have been done in a convincing way in our Church”.

As Jesus and Barabbas face the judgement of the crowds who will decide who will live, the priest suggested that it was the Roman prefect who bore ultimate responsibility for Christ’s death. And here, with “an act of love for her husband”, Pilate’s wife pleads for Jesus’ release, the two lay commentators in Matthew’s Gospel, lay at the heart of Fr Michelini’s meditation on Thursday afternoon, 9 March. The eighth meditation of the series was dedicated symbolically to “all of the world’s crucifixes” which have blackened society from the last century onwards: “the unburied bodies of men and women, burned in the gas chambers or buried in the mass graves of the gulags, lost in the Mediterranean, rediscovered in the ocean because they had been thrown from planes in those tawels de la morte”.

This mystery of suffering, death on the cross and life, the Francis can stress, can be rediscovered in the attitude of “awe” that demonstrated by the women who, in Matthew’s Gospel, lovingly attended to Christ’s body in the tomb. The news of Christ’s Resurrection, the priest recalled, was in fact announced to women. Indeed, women were “protagonists of an ‘extraordinary birth’ in a symbolic sense, a glimpse of which can be seen in their remaining seated at the tomb” which, carved out of rock, is itself the image of a womb which, through the Resurrection, gives birth to life anew. Therefore, Fr Michelini, women go to this “place of death and experience the birth of life” and there, all they today do is “wait”. Thus, the invitation to consider our own feelings about death and how we respond to life’s difficulties: with fear, or resignation.

In the ninth and final meditation of the six-day retreat, Fr Michelini reflected on missed opportunities for compassion. Departing from Matthew’s Gospel, the papal preacher delved into Franz Kafka’s 20th century classic novella, The Metamorphosis, to analyze a lack of compassion Gregor Samsa’s family shows him when he wakes one day to find himself transformed into a repugnant, “horrible insect”. Had Gregor received compassion from his family, Fr Michelini noted, he “would have rediscovered his own humanity” and “would have returned to being a man”. The Franciscan drew an analogy between Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis and Jesus’ apparition on Mount Tabor in which “Jesus was not transformed”, but rather, showed his true being. And from here, we understand “the Risen Christ is the same historic Christ, the man”.

Today, Fr Michelini reflected, in a contemporary “post-truth” world marked by the “globalization of indifference”, mankind may have “doubts” and “objections” regarding Christ’s Resurrection. Yet the Resurrection, he said, remains a “meta-historical fact” in which one trusts by “looking to the empty tomb and listening to the stories of Jesus’ subsequent apparitions to the disciples”. Fr Michelini said to reinforce this trust, one must “study the Bible more” to “bridge the gap between the New Testament and today’s man”. In conclusion, he said, this – combined with the “compassion” that would help Samsa’s Gregor “Samsa – is the most effective way to spread the Good News of Christ’s Resurrection in the modern day.

A thank-you from Francis

The right word to each of us

On Friday, 10 March, Fr Giulio Michelini, OFM, led the last of the meditations in the chapel of the Casa del Divino Maestro of the Pauline Fathers in Ariccia. The Holy Father thanked him at the end of the meditation, which marked the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises for the Pontiff and members of the Roman Curia. The following is a translation of the Pope’s remarks given in Italian.

I would like to thank you for the good that you wanted to do for us and for the good that you have done for us.

First of all, for having shown yourself as you are, natural, without presenting a “façade”. Natural. Without artifice. With all your baggage: studies, publications, friends, parents, the young friars you have to take care of... Everything, everything. Thank you for being “normal”.

Secondly, I want to thank you for the work you have done, for how you prepared. This means responsibility, taking things seriously. And thank you for all that you have given us. It is true: there is a mountain of things on which to meditate, but Saint Ignatius says that when one finds something in the Exercises which offers consolation or desolation, one must stop there and not proceed further. Certainly each of us has found one or two of these among all this. And the rest? For another time. Perhaps the most important, the strongest things, say nothing to some, and perhaps a tiny word, a “small thing says more... Like that anecdote of the great Spanish preacher who, after a great, well-prepared sermon, was approached by a man – a great public sinner – in tears, asking for confession. He confessed, a floodgate of sins and tears, sins and tears. The confessor, surprised – as he knew the life of this man – asked him: “tell me, at what point did you feel that God was touching your heart? With which word?”. – “When you said let us move on to another topic”, [laughter]. At times the simplest words are the ones that help us, or the most complicated ones: the Lord gives the [right] word to each of us.

I thank you for this and I hope you will continue to work for the Church, in the Church, in excessis, in the many things that the Church entrusts you with. But above all, I hope you may be a good friar.

A sign of solidarity from Ariccia

Help for the people of Syria

Prayer and solidarity united Pope Francis and the Roman Curia with war-torn Aleppo during the week of Spiritual Exercises. The pope celebrated Mass for Syria on Friday morning, 10 March, the last day of the retreat in Ariccia. In a gesture of closeness and solidarity, and with the participation of the Roman Curia, a donation of 100,000 euros was made for the poor people of Aleppo, a sort of spiritual winning between the preacher of the exercises, Fr Giulio Michelini, OFM, and his confirere in Aleppo, Ibrahim Alsabagh. At the end of the final meditation, Pope Francis wished to thank Fr Michelini for the preparation with which he guided the reflections. The Pope recalled that, at times, a simple word is enough to promote spiritual meditations. The Holy Father returned to the Vatican late Friday morning.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good Morning!

The Gospel of this second Sunday of Lent presents the narrative of the Transfiguration of Jesus (cf. Mt 17:1-9). Taking aside three of the Apostles, Peter, James and John, He led them up a high mountain. And that is where this unique phenomenon took place: Jesus’ face “shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (v. 2). In this way, the Lord allowed the divine glory which could be understood through faith in his preaching and his miraculous gestures, to shine within Him. The Transfiguration was accompanied by the apparition of Moses and Elijah who were “talking with him” (v. 3).

The ‘brightness’ which characterizes this extraordinary event symbolizes its purpose: to enlighten the minds and hearts of the disciples so that they may clearly understand who their Teacher is. It is a flash of light which suddenly opens onto the mystery of Jesus and illuminates his whole person and his whole story. By now decisively headed toward Jerusalem, where he will be sentenced to death by crucifixion, Jesus wanted to prepare his own for this scandal – the scandal of the Cross – this scandal which is too intense for them to circumvent the Cross, but to show where the Cross leads. Those who die with Jesus, shall rise again with Jesus. The Cross is the door to Resurrection. Whoever struggles alongside him will triumph with him. This is the message of hope contained in Jesus’ Cross, urging us to be strong in our existence. The Christian Cross is not the furnishings of a house or adornments to wear but rather, the Christian Cross is a call to the love with which Jesus sacrificed himself to save humanity from evil and sin. In this Lenten season, we contemplate with devotion the image of the Crucifix, Jesus on the Cross: this is the symbol of Christian Faith, the emblem of Jesus, who died and rose for us. Let us ensure that the Cross marks the stages of our Lenten journey in order to understand ever better the seriousness of sin and the value of the sacrifice by which the Saviour has saved us all.

After the Angelus the Holy Father continued: Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to express my closeness to the people of Guatemala who are grieving the serious and tragic fire that broke out inside the Casa Refugio Virgen de la Asunción, causing death and injury to the young women living there. May the Lord welcome their souls, heal the injured, console their grieving families and the entire nation. I pray and ask you to pray with me for all young victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and war. This is a plague, a hidden cry which must be heard by us all and which we cannot continue to pretend not to see and hear.

A warm greeting to all of you here, faithful of Rome and from many other parts of the world.

I greet the pilgrims of Freiburg and Mannheim, Germany, and those of Lebanon, as well as the marathon runners from Portugal.

I greet the parish groups from Gioiosa Ionica and Pachino; the students from Dalmine and Busto Arsizio: it is true what you say: “No to a culture of waste” [reading a banner held up in the Square], and the youth choir from Bergamo, “Goccia dopo goccia”.

Have a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch. Arrivederci!