Pope’s sorrow and prayers for victims of massacre in Sri Lanka

Acts of terrorism are never justifiable

To remain human

And never for a single moment
Renounce your true self.
But be alive, and only alive.
Only alive, to the end.

(Robert Pasternak)

253 people were killed and over 500 wounded by the bombs that exploded in three churches and three hotels in three different cities on Easter Sunday. In Saint Sebastian Church alone — in Negombo, just north of the capital of Colombo — more than 100 people were killed. These are the figures, in their eloquent callousness.

The day of the most important celebration for Christians and the place of worship were transformed into a moment and place of death and terror. The paradox is atrocious: on the same day in which some men invoke God’s name to pray to him and ask for peace, other men use that same name to justify their homicidal act. Is it the same God? The verb used reveals the significance of this contradiction: on the one hand “to invoke”, and on the other “to use” — herein lies the difference. God is the loftiest horizon, beyond the reach of our hands, a horizon that allows the world to be seen in another light. He is not, however, an object that can be used and manipulated. The view from God’s perspective creates a disarming effect; the illusion of possessing God ends.

On Easter Sunday morning, 21 April, a series of vile terrorist attacks was carried out in three Christian churches and three hotels in Sri Lanka, killing 253 people and wounding some 500 more. (Initial reports had set the death toll at 359, a number reduced days later by the country’s Health Ministry.) Apprised of the deadly massacre at the end of his Urbi et Orbi Message that morning, Pope Francis spoke of “the grave attacks which today, the very day of Easter, caused grief and suffering”. He expressed his “heartfelt closeness to the Christian community, struck while gathered in prayer, and to all the victims of such cruel violence”, while entrusting “to the Lord those who were tragically killed”, and praying “for the wounded and all those suffering from this tragic event”. The Holy Father continued to express his concern at Monday’s Regina Coeli and on social media in the days that followed.

Holy Week and Easter celebrations

At the General Audience the Holy Father continues catechesis on the Lord’s Prayer

The power of forgiveness

“Jesus includes the power of forgiveness in human relationships”, Pope Francis emphasized this at the General Audience on Wednesday, 24 April, addressing the faithful gathered in Saint Peter’s Square. Returning to the series of catecheses on the Lord’s Prayer, the Pontiff focused on the phrase “as we also have forgiven our debtors”, inspired by the passage from the Gospel of Matthew. The following is a translation of the Pope’s catechesis, which he delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Today we shall complete the catechesis on the fifth request of the “Lord’s Prayer”, by focusing on the expression “as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12). We have seen that it is actually human to be debtors before God: we have received everything from him, in terms of nature and grace. Our identity has not only been wanted, but has been loved by God. Truly, there is no room for presumption when we fold our hands to pray. In the Church there is no ‘self-made man’, men who have created themselves. We are all debtors to God, and to all those people who have given us favourable living conditions. Our identity is built first and foremost with the good received. The first is life.

One who prays learns to say “thank you”. And so often we forget to say “thank you”. We are selfish. One who prays learns to say “thank you” and to ask God to be benevolent to him or her. As much as we may strive, there is always an inexhaustible debt to God which we can never pay back: he loves us infinitely more than we love him. And then, as much as we try to live according to Christian Teaching, in our life there will always be something for which to ask forgiveness. Let us think about days spent lazily, about moments in which rancour has filled our heart, and so on. These unfortunately not rare experiences are what make us implore: “Lord, Father, forgive us our debts”. Thus we ask God for forgiveness.

On close reflection, the invocation could well be limited to this first part, that would have been nice. But instead Jesus joins it to a second expression that forms one with the first. The vertical relationship with benevolence on God’s
part refracts and is called to translate into a new relationship with our brothers and sisters: a horizontal relationship. The good God invites all of us to be good. The two parts of the invocation are linked together, with a stern conjunction: we ask the Lord to forgive our debts, our sins, as we forgive our friends, the people who live with us, our neighbours, the people who have done something bad to us.

Every Christian knows that forgiveness exists for him or her. We all know this: God forgives everything and forgives always. When Jesus describes the face of God to his disciples, he outlines it with expressions of tender mercy. He says that there is more joy in heaven for one sinner who repents than for a multitude of righteous people who need no repentance (cf. Lk 15:7, 10).

Nothing in the Gospels lets one suspect that God would not forgive the sins of whoever is ready and asks to receive the gift of his peace and be- come his witnesses in the world. For if you forgive, God also will forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 18:21-22). But this is powerful! I recall: several times I have heard people say: "I will never forget that person! I will never forgive that person for what he did to me!" But if you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. You close the door. Let us consider whether we are able to forgive or if we do not forgive.

When I was in the other Diocese, a distressed priest told me that he had gone to administer the Last Rites to an elderly woman who was on her deathbed. The poor woman could not speak. And the priest asked her: "Madam, do you repent of your sins?" The woman said "yes", she could not confess them, but she said yes. It is sufficient. And then again: "Do you forgive others?" And the woman, on her deathbed: "No". The priest was upset. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. Let us consider, we are here, whether we forgive or whether we are able to forgive. "Father, I cannot do it, because those people treated me so harshly". But if you cannot do it, ask the Lord to give you the strength to do so. Lord, help me to forgive.

Here again, we find the connection between love of God and love of neighbour. Love attracts love; for- giveness attracts forgiveness. Again in Matthew we find a very strong parable dedicated to fraternal for- giveness (cf. 18:21-35). Let us listen to Jesus.

There was a servant who had con- tracted an enormous debt with his king: 10,000 talents! An impossible amount to repay; I do not know how much that would be today, but hundreds of millions. However, a miracle happened, and that servant received not a deferred payment but full commutation. An un-hoped for grace! But here, immediately there- after, that servant got angry with a fellow servant who owed him 100 denari — something minor — and, al- though this is an attainable sum, he would not accept excuses or pleas. Therefore, in the end, that servant was called for and had him con- demned. Because if you do not strive to forgive, you will not be for- given; if you do not strive to love, neither will you be loved.

Jesus includes the power of for- giveness in human relationships. In life not everything is resolved with justice. No. Especially where one must put a stop to evil, someone must love beyond what is due, in or- der to recompense a relationship of grace. Evil knows revenge, and if it is not stopped, it risks spreading, suffocating the entire world.

Jesus replaced the law of retaliation — what you have done to me, I will do to you in return — with the law of love. What has God done for me? I shall do for you in return! Let us consider today, in this most beautiful week of Easter, whether I am able to forgive. And if I do not feel I can, I must ask the Lord to give me the grace to forgive, because knowing how to forgive is a grace.

God gives every Christian the grace to write a story of good in the life of his or her brothers and sisters, especially of those who have done something regrettable or wrong. With a word, an embrace, a smile, we can pass on to others the most precious thing we have re- ceived. What is the most precious thing we have received? Forgiveness which we too must be able to give to others.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking pil- grims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philip- pines, Singapore and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

I address a thought to young people, to the elderly, to the sick and to the needy.

I invoke upon everyone the joy and hope that flow from the Easter of Christ. May you have the experience of the living Jesus, in order to receive the gift of his peace and be- come his witnesses in the world.
Anointed to anoint

Pope Francis celebrates Chrism Mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica

“We have been anointed to anoint”. Pope Francis shared this reminder with the nearly 3,000 priests who concelebrated the Chrism Mass with him in the Vatican Basilica on Thursday morning, 18 April. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s homily.

The Gospel of Luke, which we just heard, makes us relive the excitement of that moment when the Lord made his own the prophecy of Isaiah, as he read it solemnly in the midst of his people. The synagogue in Nazareth was filled with his relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, friends... and not only. All had their eyes fixed on him. The Church always has her eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, whom the Spirit sends to anoint God’s people.

The Gospels frequently present us with this imagery of the Lord in the midst of a crowd, surrounded and pressed by people who approach him with their sick ones, who ask him to cast out evil spirits, who hear his teachings and accompany him on the way. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me” (Jn 10:27-28).

The Lord never lost that direct contact with people. Amid those crowds, he always kept the grace of closeness with the people as a whole, and with each individual. We see this throughout his public life, and so it was from the beginning: the radiance of the Child gently attracted shepherds, kings and elderly dreamers like Simeon and Anna. So it was on the cross: his Heart draws dreamers like Simeon and Anna. So it was from the beginning: we are anointed to anoint. We anoint by the hands of those I anoint. In that gesture of anointing, we can sense that our own anointing is being renewed.

Let us take a closer look at the way the Gospel views the crowd. Luke points out four large groups who are the preferred beneficiaries of the Lord’s anointing: the poor, the blind, the oppressed and the captives. He speaks of them in general terms, but then we are glad to see how the course of the Lord’s ministry is marked by how these anointed ones gradually take on real names and faces. When oil is applied to one part of the body, its beneficial effect is felt throughout the entire body. So too, the Lord, taking up the prophecy of Isaiah, names various “crowds” to whom the Spirit sends him, according to what we may call an “inclusive preference”: the grace and the charism given to one individual or a particular group then redounds, every action of the Spirit, to the good of all.

The poor (in Greek, pōchos) are those who are bent over, like beggars who bow down and ask for alms. But poor too (ptoches) was that widow who anointed with her fingers the two small coins which were all she had to live on that day. That anointing by the widow to give alms went unnoticed by the eyes of all except Jesus, who looks kindly on her lowliness. Through her, the Lord can accomplish fully his mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the poor. Paradoxically, the disciples heard the good news that people like her exist. She — the generous woman — could not imagine that she would “make it to the Gospel”, that her simple gesture would be recorded in the Gospel. Like all those men and women who are the “saints next door”, she lives interiorly the joyful fact that her actions “carry weight” in the Church, and are worth more than all the riches of the world.

The blind are represented by one of the most likable figures in the Gospel: Bartimeus (cf. Mt 20:46-52), the blind beggar who regained his sight and, from that moment on, had only eyes to follow Jesus on his journey. The anointing of the gaze! Our gaze, to which the eyes of Jesus can restore the brightness which only gratuitous love can give, the brightness daily stolen from us by the manipulative and banal images with which the world overwhelms us.

To refer to the oppressed (in Greek, aichmalotoi), Luke uses a word that contains the idea of “trauma”. It is enough to evoke the parable—or perhaps Luke’s favourite—of the Good Samaritan who anoints with oil and binds the wounds (Lk 10:34) of the man who had been beaten by robbers and left lying at the side of the road. The anointing of the wounded flesh of Christ! In that anointing we find the remedy for all these traumas that leave individuals, families and entire peoples ignored, excluded and unwanted, on the sidelines of history.

The captives are prisoners of war (in Greek, aichmalotai), those who had been led at the point of a spear (aichmatismenos). Jesus would use the same word in speaking of the taking of Jerusalem, his beloved city, and the deportation of its people (Lk 21:24). Our cities today are taken prisoner not so much at spear point, but by more subtle means of ideological colonization.

Only the anointing of culture, built up by the labour and the art of our forebears, can free our cities from these new forms of slavery.

As for us, dear brother priests, we must not forget that our evangelical models are those “people”, the “crowd” with its real faces, which the anointing of the Lord raises up and revives. They are the ones who complete and make real the anointing of the Spirit in ourselves; they are the ones whom we have been anointed to anoint. We have been taken from their midst, and we can fearlessly identify with these ordinary people. Each of us has our own story. A little bit of memory will do us much good. They are an image of our soul and an image of the Church. Each of them incarnates the Good Samaritan.

We priests are the poor man and we would like to have the heart of the poor widow whenever we give alms, touching the hand of the beggar and looking him or her in the eye. We priests are Bartimeus, and each morning we get up and pray: “Lord, that I may see”. We priests are, in some point of our sinfulness, the man beaten by the robbers. And we want first to be in the compassionate hands of the good Samaritan, in order then to be able to show compassion to others with our own hands.

I confess to you that whenever I confirm and ordain, I like to smear with chrim the foreheads and the hands of those I anoint. In that generous anointing, we can sense that our own anointing is being renewed. I would say this: We are not distributors of bottled oil. We have been anointed to anoint. We anoint by distributing ourselves, distributing our vocation and our heart. When we anoint others, we ourselves are anointed anew by the faith and the
Brothers in service

At Mass “In Coena Domini” Pope Francis washes the feet of 12 inmates

On Holy Thursday afternoon, 18 April, Pope Francis visited a correctional facility in Velletri, a town on the outskirts of Rome, where he presided the Mass of the Lord’s Supper and the traditional rite of the washing of feet, which mark the beginning of the Paschal Triduum. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s homily, which he delivered extemporaneously in Italian.

I greet everyone and I thank you for the welcome.

I received a nice letter a few days ago from some of you who are not here today, but who said such beautiful things and I thank them for what they wrote.

I am closely united with everyone in this prayer: with those who are here and with those who are not.

We heard what Jesus did. It is interesting. The Gospel says: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands”, in other words Jesus had all the power, all of it. And then he begins to perform this gesture of washing feet. It is an act that slaves did at that time, because there was no asphalt on the roads and when people arrived, their feet were dusty, when they arrived at a house for a visit or for lunch, there were slaves who washed their feet. And Jesus makes this gesture: he washes feet. He performs the act of slaves: he who was all powerful, he who was Lord, performs this act of slaves. And then he advises everyone: “You also ought to wash one another’s feet”. That is, serve one another, be brothers in service. Do you need something, a service? I will do it for you. This is fraternity. Fraternity is humble, always: it is serving. And I will make this gesture – the Church wants the Bishop to do it every year, once a year, at least on Holy Thursday – to imitate Jesus’ gesture and also to do good for himself with the example, because the Bishop is not the most important one, but he should be the greatest servant. And each of us must be servants of others.

This is Jesus’ rule and the rule of the Gospel: the rule of service, not of dominating, of doing harm, of humiliating others. Service! Once, when the Apostles were arguing amongst themselves, they were debating “which of us is the greatest”. Jesus took a child and said: “The child. If your heart is not a childlike heart, you will not be my disciples”. A childlike heart, simple, humble but a servant. And there he adds something interesting that we can connect to this gesture today. He says: “Pay heed: those who are supposed to rule over nations, lord it over them ... but it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be a slave”. We too must all be servants. It is true that there are problems in life: we argue amongst ourselves ... but this must be something that passes, something fleeting, because in our heart there must always be this love of serving others, of being at the service of others.

And may this gesture that I will perform today help us to be greater servants to one another, better friends, more like brothers in service. With these sentiments let us continue the celebration with the washing of the feet.

To remain human

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The fanaticism of fundamentalism and terrorism, purporting to forget the reality of facts and the actual experience of peoples, often identifies Christianity with the West. But the Christianity/West equation does not bear out, between religion and reason. However, the relationship between the two is essential for the mutual purification that prevents the very appearance of venerates such as fundamentalism and violence.

Lastly, another lesson which has not yet been learned is on the essence of Christianity which is not a culture and does not identity with any culture nor any particular ethnicity. The fanaticism of fundamentalism and terrorism, purporting to forget the reality of facts and the actual experience of peoples, often identifies Christianity with the West. But the Christianity/West equation does not bear out, because the heart of Christianity is the spiritual message of the Gospel which is addressed to all mankind, in the light of which the Church comes into contact with all cultures and enhances the good and human essence of every culture.

This is the Pope’s “humanist” line which allows the tenuous path to peace to develop in spite of the violent reactions of fanatics, and it is on this path that the Church, the prayerful and hardworking People of God, must continue the journey.

Andrea Mondi
Prototype of the rejected

RANIERO CANTALAMESSA

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Is 53:3). These are the prophetic words of Isaiah with which we begin the Liturgy of the Word today. The account of the passion that follows has given a name and a face to this mysterious man of sorrows who was despised and rejected by all men: the name and face of Jesus of Nazareth. Today we want to contemplate the Crucified One specifically in his capacity as the prototype and representative of all the rejected, the dispossessed, and the “discarded” of the earth, those from whom we turn aside our faces so as not to see them.

Jesus did not begin to be that man just at his passion. Throughout his life he was part of this group. He was born in a stable “because there was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7). In presenting him in the temple, his parents offered “two turtledoves or two young pigeons,” the offering prescribed by the law for the poor who could not offer a lamb (cf. Lev 12:8). That was a genuine proof of poverty in Israel of that time. During his public life, he has nowhere to lay his head (cf. Mt 8:20) he is homeless.

Now we come to his passion. In the Passion of Jesus there is a moment that we do not often focus on but that is extremely significant: Jesus in the praeternatum of Pilate (cf. Mk 15:16-20). The soldiers had noticed a bramble bush in the adjacent open space; they gathered some thorny branches from it and pressed them into his head; to mock him they put a cloak on his shoulders that were bound with a rough rope; they placed a reed in his hands were bound with a rough rope; they placed a reed in his hands; an ironic symbol of his royalty in this context. “At the time of public auction, slaves experienced the anguish of seeing wives separated from their husbands and children from their parents, being sold at times to different masters. It is easy to imagine the spirit with which they sang out in the sun or inside their huts, “Nobody knows the trouble I have seen. Nobody knows, but Jesus”.

This is not the only meaning of the passion and death of Christ, and it is not even the most important. The most profound meaning is not social but spiritual and mystical. That death redeemed the world from sin; it brought the love of God to the farthest and darkest place in which humanity has been trapped in its flight from him, that is, death.

This is not, as I said, the most important meaning of the cross, but the one that all people, believers and non-believers, can recognize and receive.

I repeat, everyone, and not just believers. Through the event of the Incarnation of the Son of God he made himself man and united himself to all of humanity, but through the manner of his Incarnation he made himself one of the poor and rejected and embraced their cause.

For us the Crucified One was rejected; it was his manner of life which, after Christ, becomes the judge, “the stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone” (cf. Acts 4:11). The final word is not and never will be injustice and oppression. Jesus not only restored dignity to the dispossessed of the world, he also gave them hope!

In the first three centuries of the Church the celebration of Easter was not spread out over several days the way it is now. Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Everything was concentrated in one day. Both the death and resurrection were commemorated at the Easter Vigil. To be more precise, neither the death nor the resurrection were commemorated as distinct and separate events; instead what was commemorated was the passage of Christ from one to the other, from death to life. The word “pascha” (pesach) means “passage”: the passage of the Jewish people from slavery to freedom, the passage of Christ from this world to the Father (cf. Jn 13:1), and the passage from sin to grace for those who believe in him.

It is the feast of the reversal directed by God and accomplished in Christ, it is the beginning and the promise of the unique turnaround that is completely just and unforeshadowed by the Cross of Christ. It is the beginning and the promise of the unique turnaround that is completely just and unforeshadowed by the Cross of Christ. It is the beginning and the promise of the unique turnaround that is completely just and unforeshadowed by the Cross of Christ. It is the beginning and the promise of the unique turnaround that is completely just and unforeshadowed by the Cross of Christ. It is the beginning and the promise of the unique turnaround that is completely just and unforeshadowed by the Cross of Christ.

The Gospel does not in fact stop here. It says something else: it says that the Crucified One is risen! In him a total reversal of roles has taken place: the vanquished has become the victor; the one judged has become the judge, “the stone which was rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone” (cf. Acts 4:11). The final word is not and never will be injustice and oppression.

Today we want to contemplate the Crucified One specifically in his capacity as the prototype and representative of all the rejected, spurned, pariahs of the earth, those from whom we would want to exclaim, “You who are rejected, despised, pariahs of the earth; the greatest man in history was one of you! Whatever nation, race, or religion you belong to, you have the right to claim him as yours.”

The African-American writer and theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the theologian Howard Thurman — the 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We thank you Lord because by your death and resurrection you have delivered us from the dominion of sin and death and have given us new life and freedom. Lord, you too bore the weight of carrying that rough wooden Cross. In vain, you — the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. Lord, have mercy on the many, all too many, innocent, defenseless and respected for not respecting others, as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Help us rediscover the goods, bought and sold at will. Help us to see that hatred and revenge. Make us capable of asking for, and granting true justice can never be based on hatred and revenge. Make us capable of asking for, and granting true justice can never be based on

Let us pray together and say:
Lord Jesus, you too bore the weight of carrying that rough wooden Cross. In vain, you — the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. Lord, have mercy on the many, all too many, innocent, defenseless and respected for not respecting others, as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Help us rediscover the goods, bought and sold at will. Help us to see that

With Christ and with the women on the Way of the Cross

Introduction

Fifty days have now passed since we began our Lenten journey with the imposition of ashes. Today we enter into the last phase of our earthly life the Lord Jesus, to whom we also gave our hearts and our love. And on this Cross, he cried out "Graetissimam crinem," it is finished. We have gathered in this place where thousands of people once suffered martyrdom for their fidelity to Christ. We want to this our defense in union with the priest, the outcast of our societies and all those who even now are enduring enslavement as victims of our nation-mindset, our institutions and our laws, but especially our indifference and harshness of heart. We Christians suffer even from that disease. May the Cross of Christ be present around us and be our light and our hope, that with the love of Christ we may grow in love, and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life.

First Station

Jesus is condemned to death

"Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

Lord, who could have a better dis- ciple of yours than Mary your mother? May Mary your mother guide us to the Father’s throne, for in her, we will even in the darkest moments in her life, you have been present to us. She is the one who, with her heart, the one who accom- panied you throughout your earthly life and who will continue to follow you on the road to Calvary and Golgotha. May she be the sign of your at- tention and tender and present and at any moment of your life and be a sign of your unceasing love.

Lord, how many mothers even today share the experience of your own life, you have taught us to bear your children and to share in your suffering and death but also of new life, embra- ching the lives of all those young women and men who experience only the oppres- sion, arrogance and indiffer- ence of others, who deceive, steal and sell children. Would you like for us to be able to regain the oneness of your ‑ that we might have been the age of their own——and that we might have been the age of the next generation when the truth of your words might have been the age of our own souls also, that thoughts out of many, many years of work. In the knowledge that in the love of our brothers and sisters, in the knowledge that in understanding the greatest need, may Mary today be able to speak on behalf of those who have no voice.

Let us pray together and say:
Lord help us to do your will — when we are tired and dis- couraged.
—— when we feel the burden of our weaknesses, when you ask us to share the sufferings of others.

Sixth Station

Jesus cleanses our eyes so that we can see our face in the face of our brothers and sisters, especially in those who are the poorest and the poorest and the poorest and the poorest and especially in those who are the poorest and the poorest.

Lord Jesus, cleanse our eyes so that we can see our face in the face of our brothers and sisters, especially in those who are the poorest and the poorest.

Jesus and the women at the Cross

"If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Lord Jesus, you too bore the weight of carrying that rough wooden Cross. In vain, you — the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. Lord, have mercy on the many, all too many, innocent, defenseless and respected for not respecting others, as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Help us rediscover the goods, bought and sold at will. Help us to see that

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Meditations for the Via Crucis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

humanity’s sufferings. The poor, the foreigner, the other, must not be seen as an enemy to be rejected and resisted, but as a brother or a sister to be welcomed and assisted. They are not a problem, but a precious resource for our fortified citadels, where prosperity and consumption fail to alleviate our growing weariness and fatigue.

Lord, teach us to see with your eyes, with that welcoming and merciful gaze with which you see our limitations and our fears. Help us to imitate you in how we regard different ideas, behaviours and points of view. Help us to realize that we are part of the same human family, and to find bold new ways of accepting diversity and working together to build communities, families, parishes and civil society.

Let us pray together and say: "Help us to share in the suffering of others":
— those grieving the death of loved ones;
— those find it hard to ask for help and comfort;
— those who have experienced oppression and violence.

NINTH STATION
Jesus falls for the third time

“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” (Is 53:7)

Lord, you fell a third time, exhausted and humiliated, beneath the weight of your Cross. Like all those young women recently arrived in Italy, I looked for her curled up and half asleep at the final destination. While governments, closed off in their palaces of power, debate, the Sahara is filled with the bones of men and women who could not survive exhaustion, hunger and thirst. How much more future new exoduses! How much cruelty is inflicted on those fleeing their homelands, in their desperate journeys, in the extortion and tortures they endure, in the sea that becomes a watery grave.

Lord, make us realize that we are all children of one Father. May the death of your Son Jesus grant to the leaders of nations and lawmakers a little more humanity for all human beings.

TENTH STATION
Jesus is stripped of his garments

"Put on then compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience". (Col 3:12)

Money, comfort, power. These are the idols of every age. Especially our own, which can boast of enormous progress in the acknowledgment of individual rights. Everything can be bought, including the body of minors, stripped of their dignity and hope for the future. We have forgotten every dignity of the body: the dignity, beauty and strength of each man and woman. Even as the world is building walls and barriers, we want to recognize and thank all those who in various ways during these past months have risked their own lives, especially in the Mediterranean, to save the lives of so many families in search of safety and opportunity. Human beings fleeing poverty, dictatorships, corruption and slavery.

Lord, help us to rediscover the beauty and richness present in every person and people as your unique gift, to be placed at the service of society as a whole and not used for our personal profit or gain. Grant, Jesus, that your example and your teaching on mercy andforgiveness, on humility and patience, may make us a little more human, and thus, more Christian.

Let us pray together and say: "Lord, give us merciful hearts":
— when faced with lust for pleasure, power and money;
— when faced with injustices inflicted on the poor and the weak;
— when faced with the illusions born of self-interest.

ELEVENTH STATION
Jesus is nailed to the Cross

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". (Lk 23:34)

Our society proportions equal rights and dignity for all human beings. Yet it practises and tolerates inequality. It even accepts extreme forms of inequality. Men, women and children are bought and sold like slaves by the new traders in human lives. The victims of trafficking are then exploited by others. And in the end, they are cast aside, discarded as worthless words. How many of them are growing rich by devouring the flesh and blood of the poor?

Lord, how many men and women today are nailed to a cross, victims of brutal exploitation, stripped of dignity, freedom and hope for the future? Their cry for help challenges us as individuals, as governments, society and as Church. How is it possible that we continue to crucify you by our complicity in the trafficking of human beings? Give us the courage and strength to repudiate:
— the exploitation and humiliation faced by many young people;
— the indifference and silence of many Christians;
— the agencies lacking in humanity and solidarity.

TWELFTH STATION
Jesus dies on the Cross

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". (Mt 27:46)

On the Cross, Lord, you bore the weight of scorn, mockery, insults, violence, abandonment and indignity. Only Mary, your Mother, and a few other women stayed with you as witnesses to your suffering and death. May their example inspire us in our commitment to stand by all those dying today on Calvaries throughout the world: in transit camps, on boats denied entry to safe ports, in shelters, hot spots and camps for seasonal workers, amid protracted negotiations about their final destination.

Lord, we implore you: help us to be true neighbours to those newly crucified and despairing in today’s world. Teach us to wipe away their tears, to comfort them, even as you were consoled by the presence of Mary and the other women beneath your Cross.

Let us pray together and say: "Lord, help us to give freely of our­selves":
— to all those suffering from injustice, hatred and vengeance; — to all those unjustly slandered and denounced; — to all those who feel alone, abandoned and humiliated.

THIRTEENTH STATION
Jesus is taken down from the Cross

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit". (Jn 12:24)

In this era of news flashes, who remembers those twenty-six young Nigerian women who drowned and whose funerals were held in Salerno? Their Calvary was lengthy and difficult. First the crossing of the Sahara desert, crammed in ramshackle buses. Then their forced stay in frightful detention centres in Libya. Finally the leap into the sea, where they met death at the gates of the promised land. Two of them were bearing in their wombs the gift of a new life, children who would never see the light of day. Yet their death, like that of Jesus taken down from the Cross, was not in vain. We entrust all these lives to the mercy of God our Father and the Father of all, especially the poor, the desperate and the abandoned.

Lord, at this hour, we hear once more the cry of Pope Francis at Lampedusa, the site of his first apostolic journey in Italy.

And now after countless shipwrecks, we continue to cry: “Has anyone wept? Has anyone wept?”

Yet five of those women have been identified. Nameless or not, all of them are our daughters and sisters. All deserve respect and remembrance. They appeal to us, through our institutions, our authorities and each of us — to accept responsibility for our actions.

Let us pray together and say: "Lord, may we join in weeping":
— at the sufferings of others;
— at all those nameless coffins;
— at the tears of so many mothers.

FOURTEENTH STATION
Jesus is laid in the tomb

"It is finished". (Jn 19:30)

The desert and the seas have become the new cemeteries of our world. The living and the dead are but one. Yet responsibility has to be taken. People let their brothers and sisters die, and ask us whether we could not, or would not, save. While governments, closed off in their palaces of power, debate, the Sahara is filled with the bones of men and women who could not survive exhaustion, hunger and thirst. How much past and present New Exodus! How much cruelty is inflicted on those fleeing their homelands, in their desperate journeys, in the extortion and tortures they endure, in the sea that becomes a watery grave.

Lord, may we make real that we are all children of one Father. May the death of your Son Jesus grant to the leaders of nations and lawmakers a little more humanity for all human beings.

Conclusion

We would like to recount the story of Favours, a nine-month-old baby, who left Nigeria together with her young parents who sought a better future in Europe. During the long and dangerous journey in the Mediterranean, her father and mother died along with hundreds of other people who had relied on unscrupulous traffickers to come to the promised land. Only Favours survived; like Moses, she was saved from the waters. May her life become a light of hope on the path towards a more fraternal humanity.

At the conclusion of your way of the Cross, we ask you, Lord, to teach us to keep watch, together with your Mother and the women who stood by you on Calvary, in expectation of your resurrection. May it be a beacon of hope, joy, new life, fraternity, acceptance and communion among peoples, religions and systems of laws. So that all the sons and daughters of man will be truly recognized in their dignity as sons and daughters of God, and never again treated as slaves.
Pope Francis’ prayer at the Colosseum

All the crosses of the world

On Good Friday evening, 19 April, after leading the Via Crucis at the Colosseum, Pope Francis offered in Italian the prayer translated below.

Lord Jesus, help us to see in your Cross all the crosses of the world:

the cross of people hungry for bread and for love;
the cross of people alone and abandoned even by their children and kin;
the cross of people thirsty for justice and for peace;
the cross of people who lack the comfort of faith;
the cross of the elderly who struggle under the weight of years and of loneliness;
the cross of migrants who find doors closed in fear and hearts armoured by political calculations;
the cross of little ones, wounded in their innocence and their purity;
the cross of humanity that wanders in the darkness of uncertainty and in the obscenity of temporary culture;
the cross of families split by betrayal, by the seductions of the evil one or by homicidal levity and selfishness;
the cross of consecrated people who tirelessly seek to bring your light into the world and feel rejected, derided and humiliated;
the cross of consecrated people who, along the way, have forgotten their first love;
the cross of your children who, while believing in you and seeking to live according to your word, find themselves marginalized and rejected even by their families and their peers;
the cross of our weaknesses, of our hypocrisy, of our betrayals, of our sins and of our many broken promises;
the cross of your Church that, faithful to your Gospel, struggles to spread your love even among the baptized themselves;
the cross of the Church, your Bride, that feels constantly assailed from within and without;
the cross of our common home that is gravely withering before our selfish eyes, blinded by greed and by power.

Lord Jesus, revive in us the hope of resurrection and of your definitive victory over all evil and all death. Amen!

Prototype of the rejected

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

one else: whether weak or strong, defenseless or tyrannical, all are subjected to the same laws and to the same human limitations. Death, like the sword of Damocles, hangs over everyone’s head by a thread. It warns against the worst evil for a human being, the illusion of omnipotence. We do not need to go back too far in time; it is enough to remember recent history to be aware of how frequent this danger is and how it leads individuals and nations to catastrophe.

Scripture has words of eternal wisdom for those who dominate the world’s stage: “Learn, O judges of the ends of the earth... Mighty men will be mightily tested” (Wis 6:1-6).

“Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps 49:20).

“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Lk 9:25).

The Church has received the mandate from its founder to stand with the poor and the weak, to be the voice for those who have no voice, and, thanks be to God, that is what she does, especially in her Chief Shepherd.

The second historical task that religions need to take on today, besides promoting peace, is not to remain silent in the face of the situation that is there for everyone to see. A few privileged people possess more goods than they could ever consume, while for entire centuries countless masses of poor people have lived without having a piece of bread or a sip of water to give their children. No religion can remain indifferent to this because the God of all the religions is not indifferent to all of this.

Let us return to the prophecy of Isaiah that we started with. It begins with a description of the humiliation of the Servant of God, but it concludes with a description of his final exaltation. God is the one speaking:

“He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied... Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Is 53:11-12).

In two days, with the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, the liturgy will give a name and a face to this victor. Let us keep watch and meditate in expectation.


Easter Vigil in the Vatican Basilica

Feast of tombstones rolled aside

On Saturday evening, 20 April, Pope Francis presided the Easter Vigil Mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica. The following is the English text of his homily.

1. The women bring spices to the tomb, but they fear that their journey is in vain, since a large stone bars the entrance to the sepulcher. The journey of those women is also our own journey; it resembles the journey of salvation that we have made this evening. At times, it seems that everything comes up against a stone: the beauty of creation against the tragedy of sin, liberation from slavery against infidelity to the covenant; the promises of the prophets against the listless indifference of the people. So too, in the history of the Church and in our own personal history. It seems that the steps we take never take us to the goal. We can be tempted to think that dashed hope is the bleak law of life.

Today however we see that our journey is not in vain; it does not come up against a tombstone. A single phrase astounds the woman and changes history: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (Lk 24:5). Why do you think that everything is hopeless, that no one can take away your own tombstones? Why do you give up into resignation or failure? Easter, brothers and sisters, is the feast of tombstones taken away, rocks rolled aside. God takes away even the hardest stones against which our hopes and expectations crash: death, sin, fear, worldliness. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the “living stone” (cf. 1 Pet 2:4), the risen Jesus. We, as Church, are built on him, and, even when we grow disheartened and tempted to judge everything in the light of our failures, he comes to make all things new, to overturn our every disappointment. Each of us is called tonight to rediscover in the Risen Christ the one who rolls back from our heart the heaviest of stones. So let us first ask: What is the stone that I need to remove, what is the name of this stone?

Often what blocks hope is the stone of discouragement. Once we start thinking that everything is going badly and that things can’t get worse, we lose heart and come to believe that death is stronger than life. We become cynical, negative and dependant. Stone upon stone, we build within ourselves a monument to our own dissatisfaction: the sepulcher of hope. Life becomes a succession of complaints and we grow sick in spirit. A kind of tomb psychology takes over: everything ends there, with no hope of emerging alive. But at that moment, we hear once more the insistent question of Easter: Why do you seek the living among the dead? The Lord is not to be found in resignation. He is risen, he is not the God of the dead but of the living (cf. Mk 16:20). Do not bury hope!

There is another stone that often seals the heart shut: the stone of sin. Sin seduces; it promises things easy and quick, prosperity and success, but then leaves behind only solitude and death. Sin is looking for life among the dead, for the meaning of life in things that pass away. Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why not make up your mind to abandon that sin which, like a stone before the entrance to your heart, keeps God’s light from entering in? Why not prefer Jesus, the true light (cf. Jn 1:9), to the glitter of wealth, career, pride and pleasure? Why not tell the empty things of this world that you no longer live for them, but for the Lord of life?

2. Let us return to the women who went to Jesus’ tomb. They had said in amazement before the stone that was taken away. Seeing the angels, they stood there, the Gospel tells us, “frightened, and bowed their faces to the ground” (Lk 24:4). They did not have the courage to look up. And how often do we do the same thing? We prefer to remain huddled within our shortcomings, cowering in our fears. It is odd, but why do we do this? Not infrequently because, glum and closed up within ourselves, we feel in control, for it is easier to remain alone in the darkness of our heart than to open ourselves to the Lord. Yet only he can raise us up. A poet once wrote: “We never know how high we are. Till we are called to rise” (E. Dickinson). The Lord calls us to get up, to rise at his word, to look up and to realize that we were made for heaven, not for earth, for the heights of life and not for the depths of death: Why do you seek the living among the dead?

God asks us to view life as he views it, for in each of us he never ceases to see an irreparable kernel of beauty. In you, he sees sons and daughters to be restored; in death, brothers and sisters to be reborn; in desolation, hearts to be revived. Do not fear, then: the Lord loves your life, even when you are afraid to look at it and take it in hand. In Easter he shows you how much he loves that life: even to the point of living it completely, experiencing anguish, abandonment, death and hell, in order to emerge triumphantly to tell you: “You are not alone; put your trust in me.”

Jesus is a specialist at turning our deaths into life, our mourning into dancing (cf. Ps 30:10). With him, we too can experience a Pasch, that is, a Passover — from self-centredness to communion, from desolation to consolations, from fear to confidence. Let us not keep our faces bowed to the ground in fear, but raise our eyes to heaven and to Jesus. His gaze fills us with hope, for it tells us that we are loved unfailingly, and that however much we make a mess of things, his love remains unchanged. This is the one, non-negotiable certitude we have in life: his love does not change. Let us ask ourselves: In my life, where am I looking? Am I gazing at graveyards, or looking for the Living One?

3. Why do you seek the living among the dead? The women hear the words of the angels, who go on to say: “Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee” (Lk 9:6). Those women had lost hope, because they could not recall the words of Jesus, his call that took place in Galilee. Having lost the living memory of Jesus, they kept looking at the tomb. Easter always needs to go back to Galilee, to reawaken its first love for Jesus and his call to remember him, to turn back to him with all our mind and all our heart. To return to a lovely love of the Lord is essential. Otherwise, ours is a “museum” faith, not an Easter faith.

Jesus is not a personage from the past; he is a person living today. Jesus is not a personage from the museum” faith, not an Easter faith. Jesus is not a personage from the past; he is a person living today. Jesus is not a personage from the museum; he is the Living One among the dead. Or again, how many times, once we have encountered the Lord, do we return to the dead, digging up regrets, reproaches, hurts and dissatisfaction, without letting the Risen Lord in?

Dear brothers and sisters: let us put the Living One at the centre of our lives. Let us ask for grace not to be carried by the current, the sea of our problems; the grace not to run aground on the shoals of sin and have a crash on the reefs of discouragement and fear. Let us seek him, let us let ourselves to be sought out by him, let us seek him in all things and above all things. And with him, we will rise again.
Pope’s sorrow at the attacks in Sri Lanka

After expressing the Urbi et Orbi Message and imparting the Blessing, the Pontiff offered his Easter greeting to the many faithful present, and recalled the grave attacks committed that morning in Sri Lanka. ‘The following is a translation of his extemporaneous remarks.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is with sorrow and heartache that I received the news of the grave attacks that today, the very day of Easter, have brought grief and sorrow to several churches and other gathering places in Sri Lanka. I wish to show my heartfelt closeness to the Christian community, struck while gathered in prayer, and to all those who have been targeted by violence. I entrust to the Lord those who were tragically killed and I pray for the wounded and all those suffering from this tragic event.

I renew my Easter greetings to all of you, who come from Italy and from various countries, as well as to those joining us through television, radio and other means of communication. On this subject, I would like to recall that 70 years ago, on Easter Sunday 1949, a Pope spoke for the first time on television. The Venerable Pius XII addressed French television viewers, emphasizing that the gaze of the Successor of Peter and of the faithful could also encourage Christian communities to use all the tools that science. Yet Easter is also the beginning of the new world, set free from the slavery of sin and death: from the heart, from the conscience. Yet Easter is also the beginning of the new world, set free from the slavery of sin and death:

May this Easter bring comfort to the people of the eastern regions of Ukraine, who suffer from the continuing conflict. May the Lord encourage initiatives of humanitarian aid and those aimed at pursuing a lasting peace.

May the joy of the resurrection fill the hearts of those who on the American continent are experiencing the effects of difficult political and economic situations. I think in particular of the Venezuelan people, of all those who lack the minimal conditions for leading a dignified and secure life due to a crisis that endures and worsens. May the Lord grant that all those with political responsibilities may work to end social injustices, abuses and acts of violence, and take the concrete steps needed to heal divisions and offer the population the help they need.

May the Risen Lord shed his light on the efforts made in Nicaragua to find as rapidly as possible a peaceful negotiated solution for the benefit of the entire Nicaraguan people.

Before the many sufferings of our time, may the Lord of life not find us cold and indifferent. May he make us builders of bridges, not walls. May the One who gives us his peace end the roar of arms, both in areas of conflict and in our cities, and inspire the leaders of nations to work for an end to the arms race and the troubling spread of weaponry, especially in the economically more advanced countries. May the Risen Christ, who flung open the doors of the tomb, open our hearts to the needs of the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalized, and all those who knock at our door in search of bread, refuge, and the recognition of their dignity.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ is alive! He is hope and youth for each of us and for the entire world. May we let ourselves be renewed by him! Happy Easter!
Holy Father again condemns attacks in Sri Lanka

Acts of terrorism are never justifiable

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Today and throughout this entire week the paschal joy of Jesus’ Resurrection, the incredible event which we commemorated yesterday, continues in the liturgy and also in life. During the Easter Vigil the words spoken by the Angels beside Jesus’ empty tomb resonate. They asked the women who had gone to the sepulchre at the dawn of the first day after the Sabbath: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Lk 24:5-6). Christ’s Resurrection is the most unsettling event in the history of mankind, which attests the victory of God’s love over sin and over death, and gives a rock solid foundation to our life’s hope. What was humanly unthinkable has happened: “Jesus of Nazareth... God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death” (Acts 2:22-24).

On this “Monday of the Angel”, the liturgy, with the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 28:8-15), takes us back to Jesus’ empty tomb. It will do us good to go in thought to Jesus’ empty tomb. The women, filled with fear and joy, depart quickly to go and bring the news to the disciples that the tomb is empty; and at that moment Jesus appears before them. “They came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him” (v. 9). They touched him: it was not a ghost; it was Jesus, alive, in the flesh. It was him. Jesus drives fear from their hearts and encourages them even more to announce to the brethren what has happened. All the Gospels place emphasis on the role of women, Mary Magdalen and the others, as the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The men, fearful, were locked in the Upper Room. Peter and John, informed by Mary Magdalen, make only a quick remark in which they state that the tomb is open and empty. But it was the women who were first to encounter the Risen One and to bear the message that he is alive.

Today, dear brothers and sisters, the words Jesus addressed to the women resonate for us too: “Do not be afraid; go and tell...” (v. 10). After the rites of the Easter Triduum, which have allowed us to relive the mystery of the death and Resurrection of our Lord, with the eyes of faith we now contemplate him Risen and alive. We too are called to encounter him personally and to become his proclaimers and witnesses.

With the ancient liturgical Easter Sequence, in these days we repeat: “Christ, my hope, is risen.” And in Him, we too have risen, passing from death to life, from the slavery of sin to the freedom of love. Thus, let us allow ourselves to be touched by the consoling message of Easter and embraced by its glorious light, which dispels the darkness of fear and sorrow. The Risen Jesus walks beside us. He reveals himself to those who invoke him and love him. First in prayer, but also in the simple joys lived with faith and gratitude. We can also feel him present in moments of sharing warmth, welcome, friendship, and the contemplation of nature. May this day of celebration, in which it is customary to do us a good opportunity to be witnesses of the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.

I hope each one will spend with faith these days of the Octave of Easter, in which the memory of Christ’s Resurrection continues. May you seize every good opportunity to be witnesses to the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.

Happy and Holy Easter to all! Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. Arrivederci!