

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

WEEKLY EDITION  IN ENGLISH*Unicuique suum Non praevalerunt*

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Vatican City

Friday, 13 March 2020

Pope's video message for Day of Prayer and Fasting

Close to those in quarantine

On Wednesday, 11 March, a Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Angelo de Donatis at the Shrine of Our Lady of Divine Love for the Day of Prayer and Fasting. For the occasion, Pope Francis sent a video message in which he addressed his prayer to the Virgin. The following is a translation of Pope Francis' video message.

O Mary,
You shine continuously on
our journey as a sign of salvation
and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you,
Health of the Sick,
who, at the Cross,
united with Jesus' pain,
keeping your faith firm.

You, Salvation of the Roman
people, know what we need,
and we trust that you will provide
for those needs so that, as at Cana
of Galilee, joy and celebration may
return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the will of
the Father and
to do what Jesus tells us.

He who took our suffering upon
Himself, and burdened Himself
with our sorrows to bring us,
through the Cross,
to the joy of Resurrection. Amen.

*We seek refuge under your protection,
O Holy Mother of God.
Do not despise our pleas – we who
are put to the test – and deliver us
from every danger. O glorious and
blessed Virgin.*



2020 World Youth Day Message



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The Holy Father's reflections via streaming

Following the 7 March statement from the Vatican Press Office to stream live Pope Francis' Sunday Angelus (see page 8) and the General Audience (see page 3), the Holy See has announced a series of additional measures designed to avoid the risk of the spread of COVID-19, aimed at guaranteeing both the safety and the participation of the faithful who are quarantined or affected by the coronavirus. Along those lines, Pope Francis has decided to allow his daily Mass at the Casa Santa Marta to also be streamed live so as to be close to those who are at home.

For this reason, his activities may be viewed on Vatican News and are made available for distribution by Vatican Media.

In accordance with the measures adopted by the Italian authorities to curb the rise of infections, the Holy See has adopted further restrictions to help limit the gathering of people at security controls. They include the closure of the Vatican Museums, the Excavation Office, the Museum of the Pontifical Villas and of the museum centres of the Pontifical Ba-

silicas. All public Masses throughout Italy have been suspended including weddings, funerals, as well as religious and cultural events.

The above measures, which were also adopted to prevent the spread of the virus throughout the various Dicasteries and other entities, will remain in force until at least 3 April 2020.

To our subscribers in Italy

We would like to inform our readers living in Italy that due to the COVID-19, the English edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* is available only online until further notice.

VATICAN BULLETIN



AUDIENCES

Monday, 9 March

Archbishop Carlos Castillo Matasoglio of Lima, Peru

H.E. Mr Séverin Mathias Akeo, Ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire, on a farewell visit

H.E. Mr Julio César Caballero Moreno, Ambassador of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, on a farewell visit

Members of the Episcopal Conference of France, on a visit *ad limina Apostolorum*

NEW DIOCESE

The Holy Father established the new Diocese of Ekwulobia, Nigeria, with territory taken from the Diocese of Awka, making it a suffragan of the Metropolitan See of Onitsha. He also appointed Bishop Peter Ebere Okpaleke as the first Bishop of Ekwulobia. Until now he has served as Bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Ahiara, Nigeria (5 Mar.).

CHANGES IN EPISCOPATE

The Holy Father appointed Fr Farly Yovany Gil Betancur as Bishop of Montelíbano, Colombia. Until now he has served as Adjunct Secretary to the Episcopal Conference of Colombia (4 Mar.).

Bishop-elect Betancur, 45, was born in Donmatías, Colombia. He holds a licence in philosophy and religious education and a degree and specialization in Canon Law. He was ordained a priest on 23 November 1999.

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Bishop Louis Portella Mbuyu of Kinkala, Republic of the Congo (5 Mar.).

The Holy Father appointed Fr Ildevert Mathurin Mouanga as Bishop of Kinkala. Until now he has served as rector of the Cardinal Emile Biayenda National Major Seminary of Brazzaville (5 Mar.).

Bishop-elect Mouanga, 53, was born in Hamon, Republic of the Congo. He holds: a degree in philosophy and theology, a licence in Sacred Scripture and a doctorate in Biblical Theology. He was ordained a priest on 16 August 1998.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Gregory John Martmayer, OFM, Conv., as Metropolitan Archbishop of Atlanta, USA. Until now he has served as Bishop of Savannah, USA (5 Mar.).

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Cardinal Philippe Barbarin from his office as Archbishop of Lyon, France (6 Mar.).

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Bishop Benedetto Tuzia of Orvieto-Todi, Italy (7 Mar.).

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Gualtiero Sigismondi as Bishop of Orvieto-Todi. Until now he has served as Bishop of Foligno, Italy, and General Ecclesiastical Assistant of Italian Catholic Action (7 Mar.).

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Bishop Singaroyan Sebastianappan from his office as Bishop of Salem, India (9 Mar.).

START OF MISSION

On 31 January, Archbishop Bruno Musarò, titular Archbishop of Abari,

Theme for World Day of Migrants and Refugees

In a communiqué released by the Holy See Press Office on Friday, 6 March, the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees will be celebrated on Sunday, 27 September 2020. As the title for his annual Message, the Holy Father has chosen "Forced like Jesus Christ to flee". The Message will focus on the pastoral care of internally displaced persons (IDPs), who currently number over 41 million worldwide.

As the title suggests, the reflection begins with the experience of the young Jesus and his family as displaced persons and refugees. This provides a Christological grounding for the Christian action of welcome or hospitality. Over the coming months, the theme will be developed in six sub-themes expressed by six pairs of verbs: to know in order to understand; to draw near so as to serve; to listen in order to reconcile; to share and thus to grow; to involve in order to promote; and finally, to collaborate and therefore to build.

Again this year, the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will encourage, prepare and support the celebration of this day. Resources are being developed and a communication campaign will soon get underway. Each month, information, reflections, and multimedia aids will be offered as means of exploring and expressing the theme chosen this year by the Holy Father.

LENTEEN SERMON

On Friday morning, 6 March, Fr Marko Ivan Rupnik, SJ, Director of the Aletti Centre, delivered the first Lenten Sermon in the Vatican's Clementine Hall.

NECROLOGY

Bishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli, OFM, titular Bishop emeritus of Tabuda, at age 78 (30 Dec. 2019)

Archbishop John Alexius Bathersby, Archbishop emeritus of Brisbane, Australia, at age 83 (9 Mar.)

Archbishop Peter David Gregory Smith, Archbishop emeritus of Southwark, Great Britain, at age 76 (6 Mar.)

New date set for 'Economy of Francesco'

The organising committee of the *Economy of Francesco* has announced that the event, previously set for 26-28 March, will now be taking place on 21 November in Assisi.



The change in date is due to the difficulties many people are facing in travelling, both on an international and national level. The Holy Father, therefore, in agreement with the committee, has set the new date of his meeting to accommodate the 2000 young people from 115 countries who are due to attend the event.

On 28 March there will be a meeting in the Papal Hall of the Sacred Convent of Assisi for a *Webinar* with the young people of the participating countries.

French Bishops on 'ad limina' visit



The Holy Father met with members of the Bishops' Conference of France in a private audience during their visit *'ad limina Apostolorum'* on Monday morning, 9 March.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

The Holy Father continued his series of catecheses on the Beatitudes at the General Audience on Wednesday morning, 11 March, from the Library of the Apostolic Palace, avoiding direct contact with the faithful to prevent the spread of Covid-19. His reflection, which focused on the fourth Beatitude, was broadcast live via radio, television and social media to ensure his closeness and blessing to all pilgrims, in particular, the sick. The following is a translation of the Pope's remarks which he shared in Italian.



Pope Francis continues his catechesis on the Beatitudes

Listen to the cry of the poor

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good Morning,

At today's audience, we shall continue to meditate on the luminous path of happiness that the Lord consigned to us in the Beatitudes. We have come to the fourth one: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*" (Mt 5:6).

We have already encountered poverty in spirit and weeping. Now we face another type of weakness, one that is linked to hunger and thirst. *Hunger and thirst* are primary needs. They have to do with survival. This should be underscored: this does not concern a general desire, but rather a vital, daily need such as nourishment.

But what does hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake mean? We are certainly not talking about those who want vengeance. Indeed in the preceding Beatitude, we spoke about meekness. Admittedly, injustice wounds humanity. Human society urgently needs fairness, truth and social justice. Let us remember that the evil suffered by women and men throughout the world reaches the heart of God the Father. What Father would not suffer over the suffering of his children?

The Scriptures speak of the suffering of the poor and oppressed which God knows and shares. For having listened to the cry of oppression raised by children of Israel – as the Book of Exodus narrates (cf. Ex 3:7-10) – God descended to free his people. But the hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake that the Lord refers to is even more profound than the legitimate need for human justice that each man and woman carries in his/her heart.

In the "Sermon on the Mount" which takes place a little later, Jesus speaks of righteousness that is greater than human rights or personal perfection, saying, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you

will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). This is the righteousness that comes from God (cf. 1 Cor 1:30).

In the Scriptures, a thirst is expressed that is more profound than a physical one, a desire at the root of our being. One psalm says: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee; my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is (Ps 63[62]:1). The Fathers of the Church speak about this anxiety that lives in the heart of mankind. Saint Augustine says: "Thou madest us for Thyself, Lord, and our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee".¹ There is an interior thirst, an inner hunger, an anxiety...

In each heart, even in that of the most corrupt and distant people, there is a hidden yearning for the light, even if it is buried under the rubble of deceit and mistakes, but there is always the thirst for truth and good which is the thirst for God. The Holy Spirit arouses this thirst. He is the living water that has shaped our dust; he is the creative breath that gave it life.

This is why the Church is sent forth to proclaim to all the Word of God, imbued with the Holy Spirit. Because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest righteousness that can be offered to the heart of humanity which has a vital need for it, even though it does not realize this.²

For example, when a man and woman marry, they have the intention of doing something great and beautiful, and if they keep this thirst alive, they will always find the way to move forward in the midst of difficulties with the help of Grace. Young people too have this hunger and they

must not lose it! We have to protect and nourish in children's hearts, the desire for love, tenderness and welcoming that they express in their sincere and luminous outbursts.

Each person is called to rediscover what truly matters, what they truly need, what makes life good, and at the same time, what is secondary and what one can easily do without.

In this Beatitude, Jesus announces – hunger and thirst for righteousness – which is a thirst that will not be disappointed; a thirst that, if supported, will be satisfied and always have a positive outcome because it corresponds with God's own heart, with his Holy Spirit that is love, and also with the seed that the Holy Spirit sowed within our hearts. May the Lord grant us this grace: to have this thirst for righteousness which is the very desire to find him, to see God and to do good unto others.

At this time, I would like to address all the sick who have contracted the virus and the many who suffer from the uncertainty

of their respective illnesses. I offer a heartfelt thanks to the hospital staff, the physicians, male and female nurses and volunteers who are close to the people who are suffering at this very difficult time. I thank all Christians, all the men and women of good will who pray at this moment, in unison, whichever religious tradition they belong to. I warmly thank you for this effort. However, I would not want this suffering, this epidemic that is so strong, to cause us to forget the poor Syrians who are suffering on the border between Greece and Turkey: a people who have been suffering for years. They have to flee war, hunger and illness. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters and the many children who are suffering there.

I also warmly thank the "Due Palazzi" Parish for the text of the *Via Crucis* for Good Friday, which I received yesterday. Thank you all for your deep meditation.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media, as we continue on our Lenten journey towards Easter. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

I offer a special greeting to *young people*, the *elderly*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. May you experience in this Lenten period, with your gaze fixed on Jesus who suffered and was Raised, the comfort and meekness of his Spirit.

¹ *Confessions*, n. 1,1,5.

² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2017: "The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us sharers in his life".



Message for World Youth Day to be celebrated at the diocesan level on Palm Sunday

The courage to take a risk and change the world

The Holy Father's Message for the 35th World Youth Day [WYD], which will be celebrated at the diocesan level on Palm Sunday, 5 April, is based on the theme "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14). It emphasizes the link between the Synod dedicated to young people and the journeys of the World Youth Days. The Message – published on 5 March – was signed by the Pontiff on 11 February, memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. Focusing his attention on this year's Message, Pope Francis stressed the word "arise" which is dedicated to the new generations on the journey from the 2019 WYD in Panama to the WYD to be held in Lisbon in 2022. The following is the English text of the Pope's Message.



"Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14)

Dear Young People,

In October 2018, with the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, the Church undertook a process of reflection on your place in today's world, your search for meaning and purpose in life, and your relationship with God. In January 2019, I met with hundreds of thousands of your contemporaries from throughout the world assembled in Panama for World Youth Day. Events of this type – the Synod and World Youth Day – are an expression of a fundamental dimension of the Church: the fact that we "journey together".

In this journey, every time we reach an important milestone, we are challenged by God and by life to make a new beginning. As young people, you are experts in this! You like to take trips, to discover new places and people, and to have new experiences. That is why I have chosen the city of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, as the goal of our next intercontinental pilgrimage, to take place in 2022. From Lisbon, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, great numbers of young people, including many missionaries, set out for unknown lands, to share their experience of Jesus with other peoples and nations. The theme of the Lisbon World Youth Day will be: "Mary arose and went with haste" (Lk 1:39). In these two intervening years, I want to reflect with you on two other biblical texts: for 2020, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14) and for 2021, "Stand up, I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen" (cf. Acts 26:16).

The ability to see pain and death

Jesus looks carefully at this funeral procession. In the midst of the crowd, he makes out the face of a woman in great pain. His ability to see generates encounter, the source of new life. Few words are needed.

What about my own ability to see? When I look at things, do I look carefully, or is it more like when I quickly scroll through the thousands

of photos or social profiles on my cell phone? How often do we end up being eyewitnesses of events without ever experiencing them in real time! Sometimes our first reaction is to take a picture with our cell phone, without even bothering to look into the eyes of the persons involved.

All around us, but at times also within us, we can see realities of death: physical, spiritual, emotional, social. Do we really notice them, or simply let them happen to us? Is there anything we can do in order to restore life?

I think too of all those negative situations that people of your age are experiencing. Some stake everything on the present moment and risk their own lives in extreme experiences. Others are "dead" because they feel hopeless. One young woman told me: "Among my friends I see less desire to get involved, less courage to get up". Sadly, depression is spreading among young people too, and in some cases even leads to the temptation to take one's own life. How many situations are there where apathy reigns, where people plunge into an abyss of anguish and remorse! How many young people cry out with no one to hear their plea! Instead, they meet with looks of distraction and indifference on the part of people who want to enjoy their own "happy hour", without being bothered about anyone or anything else.

Others waste their lives with superficial things, thinking they are alive while in fact they are dead within (cf. Rev 3:1). At the age of twenty, they can already be dragging their lives down, instead of raising them



World Youth Day Panama 2019

up to the level of their true dignity. Everything is reduced to "living it up" and seeking a morsel of gratification: a minute of entertainment, a fleeting moment of attention and affection from others... And what about the widespread growing digital narcissism that affects young people and adults alike. All too many people are living this way! Some of them have perhaps bought into the materialism of those all around them who are concerned only with making money and taking it easy, as if these were the sole purpose of life. In the long run, this will inevitably lead to unhappiness, apathy and boredom with life, a growing sense of emptiness and frustration.

Negative situations can also be the result of personal failure, whenever something we care about, something we were committed to, no longer seems to be working or giving the desired results. This can happen with school or with our ambitions in sports and in the arts... The end of the "dream" can make us feel dead. But failures are part of the life of every human being; sometimes they can also end up being a grace! Not infrequently, something that we thought would bring us happiness proves to be an illusion, an idol. Idols demand everything from us; they enslave us yet they give us nothing in return. And in the end they collapse, leaving only a cloud of dust. Failure, if it makes our idols collapse, is a good thing, however much suffering it involves.

There are many other situations of physical or moral death that a young person may encounter. I think of addiction, crime, poverty or grave ill-

ness. I leave it to you to think about these things and to realize what has proved "deadly" for yourselves or for someone close to you, now or in the past. At the same time, I ask you to remember that the young man in the Gospel was truly dead, but he was able to come back to life because he was seen by Someone who wanted him to live. The same thing can also happen to us, today and every day.

To have compassion

The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched "viscerally" by the pain of others. Jesus' own feelings make him share in other people's lives. He makes their pain his own. That mother's grief became his own. The death of that young son became his own.

As young people, you have shown over and over again that you are capable of *com-passion*. I think of all those of you who have generously offered help whenever situations demanded it. No disaster, earthquake or flood takes place without young volunteers stepping up to offer a helping hand. The great mobilization of young people concerned about defending the environment is also a witness to your ability to hear the cry of the earth.

Dear young people, do not let yourselves be robbed of this sensitivity! May you always be attentive to the plea of those who are suffering, and be moved by those who weep and die in today's world. "Some realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears" (*Christus Vivit*, 76).

If you can learn to weep with those who are weeping, you will find true happiness. So many of your contemporaries are disadvantaged and victims of violence and persecution. Let their wounds become your own, and you will be bearers of hope in this world. You will be able to say to your brother or sister: "Arise, you are not alone", and you will help them realize that God the Father loves us, that Jesus is the hand he stretches out to us in order to raise us up.

To come forward and "touch"

Jesus stops the funeral procession. He draws near, he demonstrates his closeness. Closeness thus turns into a courageous act of restoring life to another. A prophetic gesture. The touch of Jesus, the living One, communicates life. It is a touch that pours the Holy Spirit into the dead body of that young man and brings him back to life.

That touch penetrates all hurt and despair. It is the touch of God him-



"The Raising of the Widow's Son" by Anna Lea Merritt, St Martin's Church, Blackheath.

self, a touch also felt in authentic human love; it is a touch opening up unimaginable vistas of freedom and fullness of new life. The effectiveness of this gesture of Jesus is incalculable. It reminds us that even one sign of closeness, simple yet concrete, can awaken forces of resurrection.

You too, as young people, are able to draw near to the realities of pain and death that you encounter. You too can touch them and, like Jesus, bring new life, thanks to the Holy Spirit. But only if you are first touched by his love, if your heart is melted by the experience of his goodness towards you. If you can feel God's immense love for every living creature – especially our brothers and sisters who experience hunger and thirst, or are sick or naked or imprisoned – then you will be able to draw near to them as he does. You will be able to touch them as he does, and to bring his life to those of your friends who are inwardly dead, who suffer or have lost faith and hope.

"Young man, I say to you, arise!"

The Gospel does not tell us the name of the young man whom Jesus restored to life in Nain. This invites each reader to identify with him. To you, to me, to each one of us, Jesus says: "Arise". We are very aware that, as Christians, we constantly fall and have to get up again. People who are not on a journey never fall; then again, neither do they move forward. That is why we need to accept the help that Jesus gives us and put our faith in God. The first step is to let ourselves get up and to realize that the new life Jesus offers us is good and worth living. It is sustained by one who is ever at our side along our journey to the future. Jesus helps us to live this life in a dignified and meaningful way.

This life is really a new creation, a new birth, not just a form of psychological conditioning. Perhaps, in times of difficulty, many of you have heard people repeat those "magic" formulas so fashionable nowadays,

formulas that are supposed to take care of everything: "You have to believe in yourself", "You have to discover your inner resources", "You have to become conscious of your positive energy"... But these are mere words; they do not work for someone who is truly "dead inside". Jesus' word has a deeper resonance; it goes infinitely deeper. It is a divine and creative word, which alone can bring the dead to life.

Living the new life as "risen ones"

The Gospel tells us that the young man "began to speak" (Lk 7:15). Those touched and restored to life by Jesus immediately speak up and express without hesitation or fear what has happened deep within them: their personality, desires, needs and dreams. Perhaps they were never able to do this before, for they thought no one would be able to understand. To speak also means to enter into a relationship with others. When we are "dead", we remain closed in on ourselves. Our relationships break up, or become superficial, false and hypocritical. When Jesus restores us to life, he "gives" us to others (cf. v. 15).

Today, we are often "connected" but not communicating. The indiscriminate use of electronic devices can keep us constantly glued to the screen. With this Message, I would like to join you, young people, in calling for a cultural change, based on Jesus' command to "arise". In a culture that makes young people isolated and withdrawn into virtual worlds, let us spread Jesus' invitation: "Arise!" He calls us to embrace a reality that is so much more than virtual. This does not involve rejecting technology, but rather using it as a means and not as an end. "Arise!" is also an invitation to "dream", to "take a risk", to be "committed to changing the world", to rekindle your hopes and aspirations, and to contemplate the heavens, the stars and the world around you. "Arise and become what you are!" If this is our message, many young people will

stop looking bored and weary, and let their faces come alive and be more beautiful than any virtual reality.

If you give life, someone will be there to receive it. As a young woman once said: "Get off your couch when you see something beautiful, and try and do something similar". Beauty awakes passion. And if a young person is passionate about something, or even better, about someone, he or she will arise and start to do great things. Young people will rise from the dead, become witnesses to Jesus and devote their lives to him.

Dear young people, what are your passions and dreams? Give them free rein and, through them, offer the world, the Church and other young people something beautiful, whether in the realm of the spirit, the arts or society. I repeat what I once told you in my mother tongue: *Hagan lío!* Make your voices heard! I remember another young person who said: "If Jesus was someone who was only concerned about himself, the son of the widow would not have been raised".

The resurrection of that young man restored him to his mother. In that woman, we can see an image of Mary, our Mother, to whom we entrust all the young people of our world. In her, we can also recognize the Church, who wants to welcome with tender love each young person, without exception. So let us implore Mary's intercession for the Church, that she may always be a mother for her dead children, weeping for them and asking that they be restored to life. In every one of her children who dies, the Church also dies, and in every one of her children who arises, the Church also arises.

I bless your journey. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 11 February 2020, Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes



Lent 2020



Fr SEBASTIAN VAZHAKALA, MC

The season of Lent has just began, let us take this time to prepare for the great feast of Easter. Like Jesus and with him, we too, go into the solitude of the desert to be alone with the Alone who will speak to our hearts. There, we will hear his voice in the silence and the stillness of our hearts.

The world is in a big trial due to the terrible pest of coronavirus. The Lord wants all nations and people of the world to turn to him. We cannot exist nor can we have real peace, joy, health and lasting wealth without God, our Creator and Lord. May this moment of trial become a school through which we come to understand the absolute necessity of trusting in God, giving him the high honour and glory that is his due. Humankind, ignoring the Father and Creator, tries to place itself in the centre of the world. The perennial temptation of attempting to build the tower of Babel (cf. Gen 11:1-9), worshipping the golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1 ff.) ... in place of God, will end up in a terrible disaster.

This is the time to open our eyes to our God, to wake up, to read the signs of the times. Today, just like yesterday, the world belongs to God. The world is our guest house and not our permanent abode. We do not have a world without God. It doesn't depend on what or how I think!

"Were there not ten, where are the nine?" (Lk 17:11-19). One out of 10 came to acknowledge the power of God, to express his gratitude. Today, in our so-called prosperity, natural self-sufficiency and autonomy, we easily tend to forget the God who made us; we try to worship ourselves instead of God. We are tempted to place ourselves in the centre and offer ourselves incense. We are terribly mistaken. We have sinned and continue to fall into the sin of idolatry.

The first reading of Ash Wednesday gives us a glimpse of how to approach and how to face the vexing problem from every side. It is the time to fall on our knees with folded hands to cry for help to God, who alone is our true God, not wealth, not power and prestige. No political power can conquer God, nor go on living as if he is not here. Even if we deny the existence of the air we breathe because we do not see the air, the air continues to exist. We are doing something similar: we say that we neither see God nor need him and that we can manage our lives without him! He is a nuisance in our lives. It is easy, we think, to live without acknowledging God and his presence and action in our lives, his authority and sovereignty. We want to conquer God. In our attempt to do so, we are being conquered by God through suffering and pain, pestilence and natural calamities. They are meant to be medical lessons to reflect upon and change our attitude and our way of life!

Lent is a very powerful time in the year, that invites us to pray more fervently, to offer more sacrifices, to do penance and to break and share our bread with the hungry. To break and share, not to go on holding selfishly to perishable things as if they are eternal, but to break fearlessly and share generously with those who are deprived of the basic necessities of life.

Lent is a time to reflect upon the greatest love of God, manifested in Jesus. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to be its judge but to be its Saviour" (cf. Jn 3:16-17); "...The light has come into the world, but people preferred darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil..." (Jn 3:19).

Lent speaks to us of the Cross, the proof of the greatest love manifested on the Cross. Jesus' hands are stretched out, nailed to the Cross. In

the book of Exodus (17:10-13), we see that Moses was seated on a piece of stone as Aaron and Hur held his hands outstretched while the war against the Amalekites waged on. As long as Moses' hands were outstretched, the Israelites would win. We, too, are at war: with ourselves, with the devil and with all the evil in the world. It is a spiritual battle. Jesus' hands are being stretched out. Unlike Moses' hands which were held by two people, Jesus' hands were stretched outwards and nailed to the Cross, perpetually interceding with the Father for sinful humanity. "Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).

Lent invites us to a *metanoia*, a call to the radical re-orientation of one's life, a change of attitude. It calls for a transition from our way of seeing, judging and acting into God's way of seeing everything, from our way of judging and acting to God's way of doing it. This is the meaning behind Jesus' call to "repent". Lent then is a time to have Jesus' mind, heart and eyes.

During Lent fasting has a new dimension. Our fast should include all our five senses, as well as our self-will. Moreover, our fast must fight against all seven capital sins: pride, envy, anger, sloth, gluttony, lust and greed.

In this demanding time of Lent, we have to struggle against three spiritual enemies: the world, the devil and oneself (sax). At the same time, the heart and spirit of Lent involves sharing in three ways: charity, prayer and fasting (cf. Mt 6:1-6, 16-18). There is bliss and pain: bliss on account of the interior charity of the heart one experiences towards God and toward one's neighbour; pain at the indifference one has to go through in one's neighbour, whom one wants to help. Love has to pass through the crucible of pain and suffering. One has to experience a kind of labour pain in giving birth to new souls. This redemptive love can be very heartrending but it is worth experiencing. Jesus said to Saint Teresa of Calcutta: "Your vocation is to love and suffer and save souls". Here love becomes suffering love, sacrificial love, labouring love. One experiences joy because a new soul is redeemed through this labouring love, through this redemptive love.

Lent is a time of great hope, hoping against hope. Even when everything around us is dark, we have to hope against hope. Lent is a means that leads and guides us to Easter. Lent without Easter is a very sad time. Imagine having Good Friday without Easter Sunday. It is the thought of Easter Sunday that gives us strength, courage and vitality, the true orientation and joy in our everyday life of prayer, penance, sacrifice, humiliation and misunderstanding.

Lent helps us understand the Christian meaning and significance of human suffering. Suffer-

ing is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means to save souls, *Salvifici Doloris*. It is in this sense that Saint John Paul II said: "Suffering is a vocation", because it is redemptive; it redeems oneself and others. It is in this sense that the Apostles left the Sanhedrin filled with joy at being found worthy of suffering in the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 5:41). It is no wonder that Jesus demanded Saint Teresa of Calcutta and the Missionaries of Charity to be "victims of his love, ...covered with the poverty of the Cross, obedience of the Cross and charity of the Cross". It is no wonder that Jesus told her that she was the spouse of Jesus crucified. He asked her to offer more sacrifices, to smile more tenderly and to pray more fervently. It is no wonder that Jesus told Saint Teresa, MC, that "in her immolation, in being the fire of Jesus' love amongst the poor, they are going to see Jesus, know him and want him". Hence suffering and pain, cross and hardship are powerful means to see Jesus, to know Jesus and to want Jesus, thus to be saved, to be redeemed.

To conclude these few reflections on Lent in the light of all that is going on is a Herculean task. We have to hold on to the essential in life. The modern world is in pain and in sorrow because it holds on to what is ephemeral and transitory, while remaining indifferent to the essential reality of God. With him we can climb mountains, we can face challenges, we can conquer evil. The means to do this are prayer, penance and works of mercy. Here I would like to quote a beautiful reflection by Saint Peter Chrysologus:

"There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, penance and works of mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, penance obtains and works of mercy receive: these three are one and they give light to each other."

Penance is the soul of prayer; works of mercy are the life-blood of penance. Let no one try to separate them. If you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God's ear to yourself."

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery."

Let prayer, penance and works of mercy be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defence, a threefold united prayer in our favour" (Sermon 43. Office of Readings for Tuesday, Lent, week 3).

*Co-Founder with Mother Teresa of the Missionaries of Charity Contemplative Brothers

Spiritual Exercises of the Roman Curia conclude

Encouragement through faith in God

On Wednesday morning, 4 March, Fr Bovati, Secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, delivered his fifth Lenten meditation to the Roman Curia gathered in Ariccia, and to Pope Francis, who continued to follow from the Vatican. Reflecting on events narrated in Exodus, chapter 14, and the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14, he highlighted the importance of welcoming the spiritual meaning of these narratives in order to draw from them "indications that will help us in the mission entrusted to us in our priestly calling". He singled out Moses, the "servant of God", the Lord's obedient, docile and courageous instrument as "an example to be imitated", in achieving this task.

Fr Bovati used the image of a "night time crossing" to explain the interaction between the people and God, a metaphor which holds true for both the Old and the New Testament. Night time, he said, invites us to enter into the perspective of obscurity, apprehension and loss. At the same time, it is a place of "mystery where God manifests himself". And a crossing is a journey that implies a narrow passage, which also generates fear and denial. God is not an easy shortcut, Fr Bovati explained. Indeed, the journey was long and filled with traps and seemingly aimless roaming. Feeling powerless as though "made of dust", the people of Israel were afraid and so deeply disappointed in God who had promised them a hopeful path, that they began to say they were better off as slaves. This also happens to our people today, Fr Bovati pointed out, when the evangelical offer is perceived as the direction of losers or reckless people, and those who attempt to journey on the path, feel afraid, discouraged and disappointed because they are unable to see the promised advantages.

In these situations, Fr Bovati explained, mankind does not need scolding or accusations, but rather "the ministry of encouragement which consists in the trust instilling Word". Hence, "the mission of men of God is to offer strength to the uncertain, and encouragement through faith in God", confiding in the Lord's presence and intervention. Indeed, the power given to Moses was not magical. It was a mediation of salvation for the defenceless and the poor; the power of merciful love.

Fr Bovati continued his example of the "night time crossing", described in the Gospel of Matthew in which the disciples were alone and afraid in a boat at the mercy of the waves when they saw Jesus approaching, walking on the water. Instead of feeling reassured, Fr Bovati pointed out, they were afraid and worried that they were being deceived, as if by a ghost. Jesus, however, immediately tries to encourage and comfort them, telling them to, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear", and inviting Peter to join him on the water, symbolically extending this invitation to all disciples and to the entire Church. History's mediators eventually followed this invitation, Fr

Bovati said, and courageously "walked on the water", thus "experiencing the possibility and the reality of life's victory over the snares and the violence of evil". This merciful ministry, Fr Bovati concluded, supports those who have little faith and who fear they may fall.

For his sixth meditation on Wednesday afternoon, Fr Bovati focused on the depiction of God in the Book of Exodus. On the one hand, he is the God of the covenant with Israel, the God that is good and faithful, and on the other, he is an omnipotent sovereign. Thus, not much emphasis appears to be placed on man's freedom of choice. However, without the human component, the story assumes a distorted image in which mankind is reduced to a passive object. Biblical texts are complex and often complementary, Fr Bovati explained, and other passages do show that the Lord desires to arouse a response in



mankind and enter into a relationship with them.

The desert of the Israelites is the representation of our earth where we suffer but also where God reveals himself precisely "in the actions of his servants". With obedience and responsibility, like Moses, we have to take on the "task of working for the good as if our hands were the hands of God", Fr Bovati told the Curia. God chose the desert to test his people so that they could mature with faith. He chose the desert also to stir Moses and others like him who were capable of helping those who struggled. Indeed, Moses listened to the cries of those who suffered even when he did not know how to respond, because that is what God did. As servants of God, then, Fr Bovati continued, we too should experience the dual virtue of listening: listening to the voice of God and, at the same time, listening to the cry of the people entrusted to us.

Fr Bovati's seventh meditation on Thursday morning, 5 March, invited the Roman Curia to join him in "meditating on the personal commitment that the Lord asks of each of us, according to the vocation we received, the gift of grace with the duties connected to this grace". What is the first fundamental service that the minister of God is called to undertake, he asked those present. Ad-

mitedly, he continued, today's society demands priests to carry out many different tasks. But despite them, one must never lose sight of what is essential: prayer. Prayer, he explained, is not only the condition required for listening to God, but it also makes apostolic ministry possible, as authentic and concrete witness with its nature of welcoming and gratitude for the grace.

Moses, Fr Bovati explained, is an example of this permanent ministry of intercession, both as mediator of the Word of God, and as "mediator of grace for a people in constant danger of losing itself". Fr Bovati suggested reading the ministry of Moses in a modern light, by pondering on the duality of the struggle and prayer, as described in Exodus, chapter 17, when the Israelites had to fight against the Amalekites. Today's "Amalekites", intended as the enemies of the Christian Church, have many ensnaring forms "and they subtly attack those who are un-

time, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, priests look to the face of God and identify with the sinner, carrying onto themselves the sins of others, following the example of Jesus. They ask God for forgiveness even though God already knows what we need.

Those who have a responsibility in the Church are called to have a paternal attitude with attention to the most fragile ones, a necessity that is truer now than ever before. Fr Bovati then mentioned the passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Peter asks Jesus how many times he has to forgive his brother in case of sin, highlighting the importance of seeking out the lost sheep. In a sense, Jesus' invitation to never grow tired of forgiving makes the ministry of reconciliation permanent. Thus the more sin there is, the more plentiful the mercy has to be.

On Friday morning, 6 March, Fr Bovati concluded his series of Lenten meditations by addressing the theme of "God's presence". The Lord is our Emmanuel and he accompanies us on our journey. Moses, he pointed out, was the first one to understand this. It was by being in an obedient relationship with God, that he received the grace of leading the People of Israel.

Reflecting on Moses in prayerful dialogue with the Lord, Fr Bovati said that a "divine command is always proportional to the man" because it is possible to achieve. This is because God guarantees his presence through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in order to achieve it. Fr Bovati highlighted that from the very start, Moses had understood the need to have people who cooperated with him. For example, when he went to the Pharaoh, he was accompanied by Aaron and when he celebrated the Lord's triumph over the sea, he was assisted by Miriam's drums. Not only does the involvement of many to achieve a single mission demonstrate wisdom, but it also results in the emergence of a religious witness that God is the only salvation and that his presence is guaranteed by our surrender to be the only one working for the good. And this, Fr Bovati stressed, is the crucial importance of discernment. "It means submitting everything to a prophetic spiritual intuition" that knows how to recognize what God wants, what God has already put into someone without their knowledge. And this is the task of the pastor in today's complicated world. In order to do so "theoretical knowledge is not enough. A spiritual gift is required, one that is not communicated on a regular basis but distilled day by day to help people choose the right path.

Fr Bovati's reflection ended with an invitation to meditate on the Gospel passage of Matthew in which Jesus asks the Apostles to return to Galilee where their vocation began, in order to renew their faith. This is not a nostalgic request but rather recalling the gift of "following Jesus, being with him living according to his Word and his love".

ANGELUS

In an effort to avoid the risk of the spread of COVID-19 among the faithful who gather in Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis led the Angelus from the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, on Sunday morning, 8 March, rather than from the window, as customary. The Marian prayer was streamed live by Vatican News. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's reflection.



Close to the people of Idlib

The Holy Father recites the Marian prayer from the Library of the Apostolic Palace

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good Morning,

It is a bit strange, this Angelus prayer today, with the Pope "caged in" the library, but I can see you, I am close to you. And I would like to begin also by thanking that group [present in the Square] that is demonstrating and fighting "For the forgotten ones in Idlib". Thank you! Thank you for what you do. But we are praying the Angelus like this today to comply with the preventative measures, so as to avoid small crowds of people, who might facilitate the transmission of the virus.

The Gospel of this second Sunday of Lent (cf. Mt 17:1-9), presents to us the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. He takes Peter, James and John with

him up a high mountain, symbol of closeness to God, to open them to a fuller understanding of the mystery of his Person, that must suffer, die and then rise again. Indeed, Jesus had begun to speak to them of the suffering, death and Resurrection that awaited him, but they were unable to accept this prospect. Therefore, once they reached the summit of the mountain, Jesus immersed himself in prayer and was transfigured before the three disciples: "his face", says the Gospel, "shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (v. 2).

Through the wondrous event of the Transfiguration, the three disciples are called to recognize in Jesus the Son of God shining with glory. Thus, they advance in

their knowledge of their Master, realizing that the human aspect does not express all his reality; in their eyes the otherworldly and divine dimension of Jesus is revealed. And from on High there resounds a voice that says: "This is my beloved Son.... Listen to him" (v. 5). It is the heavenly Father who confirms the "investiture" – let us call it that – that Jesus already received on the day of his Baptism in the Jordan and invites the disciples to listen to him and to follow him.

It must be emphasized that, from among the group of the Twelve, Jesus chose to take James, John and Peter with him up the mountain. He reserved for them the privilege of witnessing the Transfiguration. But why did he select these three? Because they are the holiest? No. Yet, at the hour of trial, Peter will deny him; and the two brothers James and John will ask for the foremost places in his Kingdom (cf. Mt 20:20-23). However Jesus does not choose according to our criteria, but according to his plan of love. Jesus' love is without measure: it is love, and he chooses with that plan of love. It is a free, unconditional choice, a free initiative, a divine friendship that asks for nothing in return. And just as he called those three disciples, so today too he calls some to be close to him, to be able to bear witness. To be witnesses to Jesus is a gift we have not deserved; we may feel inadequate but we cannot back out with the excuse of our incapacity.

We have not been on Mount Tabor, we have not seen with our own eyes the face of Jesus shining like the sun. However, we too were given the Word of Salvation, faith was given to us, and we have experienced the joy of meeting Jesus in different ways. Jesus also says to us: "Rise, and have no fear" (Mt 17:7). In this world, marked by selfishness and greed, the light of God is obscured by the worries of everyday

life. We often say: I do not have time to pray, I am unable to carry out a service in the parish, to respond to the requests of others.... But we must not forget that the Baptism and Confirmation we have received has made us witnesses, not because of our ability, but as a result of the gift of the Spirit.

In the favourable time of Lent, may the Virgin Mary obtain for us that docility to the Spirit which is indispensable for setting out resolutely on the path of conversion.

After the Angelus prayer the Holy Father said:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet all of you recollecting in prayer at this moment. I greet in particular those participating in the training course, "Inspiring a new way of communicating"; the faithful from Torrent, in Spain; the group from Corato; the young people from Coverciano and the children receiving their First Communion from Montedorisio.

I am close to you in prayer to those who are suffering as a result of the current coronavirus epidemic, and to all those who are caring for them. I thought of them very much during the days I was on retreat. I join with my brother bishops in encouraging the faithful to live this difficult moment with the strength of faith, the certainty of hope and the fervour of charity. May the time of Lent help all of us to give an evangelical meaning also to this moment of trial and suffering.

I wish you a good Sunday. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Now I will look out of the window, so I can see you a little, in real time. Have a good lunch, and *Arrivederci!*

Pope appeals for prayers for war-torn Syria

After praying the Angelus, the Pope's thoughts turned to the people suffering in war-torn Syria.

I greet the Associations and groups engaged in solidarity with the Syrian people, and especially with the inhabitants of

the city of Idlib and of the north-west of Syria – I can see you here – compelled to flee from the recent escalation in the war. Dear brothers and sisters, I express my great apprehension, my sorrow at the inhuman situation of these helpless people, including many children whose lives are at risk. One cannot turn away from this humanitarian crisis, but instead must give it priority over every other interest. Let us pray for these people, these brothers and sisters of ours, who suffer greatly in the north-west of Syria, in the city of Idlib.



A member of the Syrian Civil Defence, also known as the "White Helmets", carrying a child (AFP)