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.

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 Basilicas. 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.
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.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Giuliano Sigismondi as Bishop of Orvieto-Todi. Until now he has served as Bishop of Foligno, Italy, and Archdiocesan Chancellor of the Diocese of Foligno (5 Mar.).

Bishop-elect Betancur, 45, was born in Donmatías, Colombia. He holds a degree in philosophy and religious education and a degree and specialization in Canon Law. He was ordained a priest on 27 November 1999.

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Bishop Louis Portella Mbuyu of Kinkala, Republic of the Congo (3 Mar.).

The Holy Father appointed Fr Ildefons Maria 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 licentiate 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 appointed the resignation of Bishop Benedetto Tuzia of Orvieto-Todi, Italy (7 Mar.).

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martelli, OFM, titular Bishop of Tabuda, at age 83 (9 Mar.).

Bishop John Alexius Bathersby, Archbishop emeritus of Brisbane, Australia, at age 85 (9 Mar.).

Bishop Peter David Gregory Smith, Archbishop emeritus of Southwark, Great Britain, at age 78 (6 Mar.).

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.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good Morning.

At today’s audience, we shall con-
tinue to meditate on the lumin-
ous 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 talk-
ing about those who want ven-
guence. Indeed in the preceding
Beatitude, we spoke about meek-
ness. 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 op-
pressed which God knows and
shares. For having listened to the
cry of oppression raised by chil-
dren 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 pro-
found 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, Je-
sus speaks of righteousness that
is greater than human rights or per-
sonal 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 ex-
pressed 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 Fath-
ers of the Church speak about
this anxiety that lives in the
heart of mankind. Saint Augustine
says: “Thou madest us for Thy-
self, Lord, and our heart is rest-
less, until it rests in Thee”. There
is an interior thirst, an inner hun-
ger, an anxiety....

In each heart, even in that of
the most corrupt and distant
people, there is a hidden yearn-
ing for the light, even if it is
buried under the rubble of de-
ceit and mistakes, but there is al-
ways 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. 4

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 pro-
tect and nourish in children’s
hearts, the desire for love, tender-
ness and welcoming that they ex-
press in their sincere and lumin-
ous outbursts.

Each person is called to redis-
cover 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 an-
nounces — 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 pos-
tive outcome because it corre-
pends 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 con-
tracted the virus and the many
who suffer from the uncertainty
of their respective illnesses. I of-
er a heartfelt thanks to the hos-
pital 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 uni-
son, whatever 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 Syri-
ans who are suffering on the bor-
der 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 famil-
ies, I invoke the joy and peace of
our Lord Jesus Christ. May Godbless you! 5

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

2 Cf. Confessions, n. 115.
3 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 Pas-
nion and Resurrection of Christ,
the Spirit makes us sharers in his
life.”

Pope Francis continues his catechism on the Beatitudes

Listen to the cry of the poor
The courage to take a risk and change the world

The Holy Father’s Message for the 25th World Youth Day (2020), which will be celebrated on the diocesan level on Palm Sunday, April 5th, is based on the theme “Young man, I say to you, arise!”. This theme is dedicated to the new generations and to young people, in the context of the Lis-

Dear Young People,

As you see, the words “arise” or “stand up” appear in all three documents. These words also speak of resurrection, of awakening to new life. They are words that constantly appear in the Exhortation Christus Vivit (Christ is Alive) that I addressed to you following the visit to San Lorenzo and that, together with the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, bring us to Lisbon with a final goal of inviting the entire Church to implement these two documents and to let them guide the mission of those engaged in the pastoral care of young people.

Let us now turn to this year’s theme: “Young man, I say to you, arise!” (Lk 7:14). I mentioned this very day at the beginning of the meeting in the town of Nain in Galilee, came upon a funeral procession of a young man who had just died. Instead, they meet with disasters and calamities, and the pain of people who want to enjoy their youth — which is less a time of dreams, your enthusiasm, your op-

The ability to see pain

Jesus looks carefully at this funerary procession. In the midst of the crowd, he makes out the face of a woman in great pain. His ability to see generated emotion, the source of physical and mental suffering. What about my own ability to see? Do I really see those who cry, those whose hopes are dashed down, instead of raising them up to the level of their true dignity. Everything is reduced to “living it up” and seeking a moment of gratifica-

To come forward and “touch”

Jesus stops the funeral procession. He takes Jesus’ hands to him. His hands are unclean from his day of work. He looks into the eyes of the pain and suffering of others. He touches them, he “gives” us to others (cf. v. 24). It is a touching gesture of solidarity. It reminds us that even one drop of compassion, small yet concrete, can unblock forces of resurrection.

The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched “uncleanly” by Jesus. Jesus’ own feel-

Living the new life as “true ones”

The Gospel tells us that the young man “began to speak” (Lk 7:12). That touch and restored to life by Jesus immediately speaks up and ex-

That is why we need to accept the invitation made by Jesus to “arise”. We are very aware that, every day, people are living this way! Some of us, due to personal experiences, are living this way, too — even if not in the same way! Therefore, this year’s Message, which focuses on Jesus’ command to “arise”, is a call for a cultural change, based on the rich experience of the Church in the realm of the spirit, the arts or society. I repeat what I once told you in my mother tongue: Hagaslo! Make your voices heard! I remember another young person who said: “If Jesus were with me, he would not only be concerned about himself, the son of his mother. He would have been able to draw near to the realities of pain and death that you encounter. You are able. It reminds us that even one dot of compassion, small yet concrete, can unblock forces of resurrection.

“Telecommunications, but not communicating. The multi-

End of message

The Church undertook a process of re-

In October 2018, with the Synod of Young People, the Faith and the bearers stood still” (Lk 7:14). At the age of twenty,

Youth and life

You and I are now on our way to Lisbon. Focusing on this year’s Message, Pope Francis asked us to “first think about the journey from the early 1970s in Panama to the 1970s to be held in Lisbon in October. The following is the English translation of the Pope’s Message:

Mary arose and went with haste and nations. The theme of the Lis-

The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched “uncleanly” by Jesus. Jesus’ own feel-

In every one of her children who

The theme of the Lis-

Young People, the faith

new life is good and beautiful, it is a touch opening up unimaginable vistas of freedom and fullness of new life. The effectiveness of that touch is unal-

Dear Young people, you are able to draw near to the realities of pain and death that you encounter. You can touch them and, like Jesus, bring life, thanks to the Holy Spirit. But only if you are first touched by his love, if your heart is moved by the experience of his goodness towards you. If you can feel God’s immense love for every human creature — especially our brothers and sisters who experience hunger and thirst, or are sick or naked, brought to life by Someone who wanted

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

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

If you give life, someone will be there to receive it. As a young person, you are the future of the Church. What are you doing when you see something beautiful, and you do something similar? Beautiful anxiety. Possess and, like a young person in possession about something or, even better, about someone, you or she will grow and start to do great things. Young people will rise from the dead, be-

It is sustained by the new life Jesus offers us is good and beautiful, it is a touch opening up unimaginable vistas of freedom and fullness of new life. The effectiveness of that touch is unal-

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End of message

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The theme of the Lis-

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

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The season of Lent has just begun, let us take this time to pitch our tent at 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. Human-kind, ignoring the Father and Creator, tries to place himself 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 32:1-7 ...), 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 depends not on what or how I think!

"Were there not ten, where are the nine?" (Lk 17:11-19). One out of ten came to acknowledge the possibility 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, to worship ourselves instead of God. We are tempted to place ourselves in the centre and offer ourselves incentive. 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 very problem in 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. We are managing 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!

It 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 his 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 1:5-6).

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 (17:10-15), 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 (sarc). 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 experien-

cing. 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, fati, sacrifice, humiliation and misunderstanding.

Lent helps us understand the Christian meaning and significance of human suffering. Suffering is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means to save souls. St. John Paul II said: “Suffering is a voca-
tion”, 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 5:44). 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 Mary, that "in her immolation, in the being of the love of Jesus among 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 it 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 these three. 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 ailing 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.
Encouragement through faith in God

On Wednesday morning, 3 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 the Book of Exodus, chapter 14, and the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14, he highlighted the importance of leading the People of Israel in the desert, a journey that is part of the 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, are many, confusing forms and they subtly attack those who are unprepared. However, the “rock on which the Church is built will withstand evil but not our active participation in faith and prayer”, he explained. We should be ourselves, challenged, which tools we use should use against those who obstruct the good with their deceit and violence.

Returning to the figure of Moses, Fr Bovati described the image of Moses on the Mount as representing the secret force that leads to triumph: immersion in God is the indispensable condition required for the success of the “fight” on earth. In other words, he added, the outcome of the war is not in the hands of the fighter, Joshua, but in those of Moses who invokes God.

In his eighth meditation on Thursday afternoon, Fr Bovati paused on the topic of intercession understood as “an intervention of loving rescue” towards those in need of “forgiveness and reconciliation with God”, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the most spiritual of ministries, among other things, because it presupposes “a true familiarity with God.”

Sin, Fr Bovati explained, is only truly known in prayer, in “the face to face encounter with the Lord”. It is in listening to his voice that one understands the seriousness of sin as an act against God. At the same 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 larger role in the ministry of intercession, so that they can “offer is perceived as the direction of mankind and进入 into a relationship with the Lord”. It is the most spiritual of ministries, among other things, 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 pointed out the need to have people who cooperate with him. For example, when he went into the path, he felt afraid, discouraged and disappointed because they were unable to see the water, symbolically extending this image in which mankind is enclosed, the gift of grace with the duty of welcoming the spiritual Exercises of the Roman Curia conclude
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

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 preventive 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 hear 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, 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 recollected in prayer at this moment. I greet in particular those participating in the training course, “Inspiring a new way of communicating”, the faithful from Torren t, in Spain; the group from Corato; the young people from Cov crentiana and the children receiving their First Communion from Montedoro.

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!