



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

"An even worse virus: indifferent selfishness"



We thank Pope Francis for the spiritual accompaniment in the heart of the health crisis, rereading the fundamental points of his pastoral teaching during these long and dramatic weeks.

On April 19, Divine Mercy Sunday, the Holy Father celebrated mass close to Palazzo della Rovere, in the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, where members of the Grand Magisterium of the Order regularly pray and the new Grand Master presided at his first public liturgy on taking office.

In this Roman sanctuary of Mercy, Pope Francis evoked a danger related to the end of the pandemic. "The risk is that we will be struck by an even worse virus, that of indifferent selfishness," he warned, calling for a momentum of solidarity. "The present pandemic, however, reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer. We are all frail, all equal, all precious. May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family!"

In these dramatic weeks, Francis has ceaselessly supported our faith and our hope. We will never forget those heartbreaking moments of Friday, March 27, in the early evening, when he raised the Blessed Sacrament with his arms to bless us, in front of an empty and rain drenched St. Peter's square, in the twilight, while the sound of the bells of the basilica overlapped the sound of ambulance sirens ... In front of the television screens, the holy and faithful people of God - "confined" because of the pandemic - gathered in communion with him, in a profound silence, to implore courage and inner strength. The miracle of this extraordinary prayer was revealed in understanding that on the way we were not alone. Instead of looking at the Vicar of Christ on the balcony of St Peter's, as in

the usual *Urbi et Orbi* blessings, we all had our eyes nailed to the Eucharist, carried by the Pope in a large monstrance to the threshold of the basilica.

He had arrived alone, in pouring rain, climbing limping towards steps of the basilica. The surreal blue of the sky was reflected on the square, evoking the abysses into which we seemed to sink for a few weeks. The miraculous crucifix that saved Rome from the plague in the 16th century was positioned in front of the basilica, precisely on the occasion of the solemn prayer. The water that fell from the sky dripped onto the statue of Christ, giving a vivid reverberation to the wooden painting; the blood really gave the impression of dripping from the pierced side, symbol of the Spirit offered for the renewal of our lives. The discreet icon of the Virgin Salus Populi Romani - also linked to the protection of the Eternal City during various epidemics - watched over us at the foot of the cross.

We held our breath, with the awareness that we were participating in a historical event. Not that it was the end of the world, but certainly the end of a world, that of globalization based on selfish and excessive consumption. Economic policies contrary to people's interest have led society to find itself disoriented in the face of a health catastrophe that has shaken all humanity. "Greedy for profit, we let ourselves be absorbed by things and confused by haste", the Pope analyzed during the homily, denouncing "our thirst for power and possession." "We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick."

Francis commented on the passage from the Gospel of Saint Mark which recounts the episode of the appeased storm, noting that - like the disciples in the boat, frightened and lost while Jesus seems to be sleeping on board - "we were taken aback." "The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities," observed the Pope, explaining that this trial time is a time of choice: "the time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not." He urged us to "reset the course of life" towards God and others, following the example of numerous current witnesses: doctors, nurses and nurses, volunteers, priests, religious "who understood that no one is saved alone." "Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons," continued the Holy Father, before giving us an exceptional blessing for the period of the epidemic.

The Pope's teaching intensified during Holy Week. With 20,000 deaths in Italy until Easter, Covid-19 continued its devastating advance, causing suffering and dismay throughout the world, where over 100,000 deaths were already recorded. On all continents, we were millions of "prisoners" of the virus who listened to the Holy Father thanks to television, live streaming, experiencing the first virtual Easter in history. During the vigil, Francis mentioned this "all to be rebuilt" experienced by the women who went to visit the tomb "after the Sabbath" (Matthew 28:1), that is, after Holy Saturday, the day of great silence. "For them it was the darkest hour, as for us," commented Peter's successor. He pointed out that in such a situation the women did not allow themselves to be paralyzed by fear, but in their homes they prepared perfumes for Christ's body, without renouncing love ... Jesus, like a seed buried in the ground, was about to make new life blossom in the world; and these women, by prayer and love, were helping to make that hope flower. How many people, in these sad days, have done and are still doing what those women did, sowing seeds of hope! With small gestures of care, affection and prayer," he added, eager to encourage any act of love in the darkness of the present historical moment. "Let us silence the cries of death, no more wars! May we stop the production and trade of weapons, since we need bread, not guns. Let the abortion and killing of innocent lives end. May the hearts of those who have enough be open to filling the empty hands of those who do not have the bare necessities," he said.

During the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on Easter Sunday, held in St. Peter's Basilica, in the physical absence of the faithful, he appealed for a "contagion of hope," observing that this advent of the coronavirus

"is not the time of indifference," neither "the time of selfishness," nor "the time of divisions" ... but of a new solidarity and innovative solutions for the good of the one human family.

Since the beginning of Holy Week, on the occasion of the celebration of Palm Sunday, he had shown us a path of trust to arise and "rediscover that life is of no use if it is not served." "Before God before the God who serves us to the point of giving his life, and, – fixing our gaze on the Crucified One – let us ask for the grace to *live in order to serve*. May we reach out to those who are suffering and those most in need. May we not be concerned about what we lack, but what good we can do for others," he added, addressing in particular to the young people to show them "the real heroes" in these days: they are not those who have fame, money and success, but "those who give themselves to serve others."

During Holy Thursday mass, commenting on the gesture of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, the Pope reiterated the important dimension of serving, "a condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven." The Holy Father paid a heartfelt tribute to the priests who sacrifice their lives for the Lord, to the servant priests, of whom a hundred have recently died in Italy, in attention to the sick in hospitals, with doctors, nurses... "They are 'everyday saints', priests who gave their lives by serving," he observed, bringing with him to the altar all the brother priests, especially "the slandered priests."

These slandered priests were also remembered on prayer on Good Friday, following the Via Crucis broadcast worldwide from St Peter's Square, in the area of the ancient circus of Nero, where the crucifixion of Christians once took place ... The meditations were written by prison inmates and in turn the "Simon of Cyrene of today" took turns to carry the cross, including doctors and nurses who daily help the sick of Covid-19.

On Easter Monday, after the Regina Cœli prayer - which replaces the Angelus from the Easter Eve to Pentecost - Francis praised the role of women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection, thanking all those who help today's society to put the person at the center of our worries instead of the god of money. Having finally regained the rhythm of the morning masses aired from his residence in Santa Marta, he continued to invite us to pray together "so that the Lord, in the difficulties of this time, will help us discover the communion between us, the unity that it is superior to any division."

The crisis that changed the world in one hundred days has allowed us to feel we are members of one great family, understanding that the only solution to defeat planetary evil is to collaborate and live together. The Easter Triduum strengthened this belief on a spiritual level, while we have become better aware of the presence of Christ inside our homes, resurrected in the very place where we live, in the domestic churches, from where "the world after" will start again...

François Vayne

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