



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 27 March 2013

Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

I am glad to welcome you to my first General Audience. With deep gratitude and reverence I take up the “witness” from the hands of Benedict XVI, my beloved Predecessor. After Easter we shall resume the Catecheses for the [Year of Faith](#). Today I would like to reflect a little on [Holy Week](#). We began this Week with Palm Sunday — the heart of the whole Liturgical Year — in which we accompany Jesus in his Passion, death and Resurrection.

But what does living Holy Week mean to us? What does following Jesus on his journey to Calvary on his way to the Cross and the Resurrection mean? In his earthly mission Jesus walked the roads of the Holy Land; he called 12 simple people to stay with him, to share his journey and to continue his mission. He chose them from among the people full of faith in God’s promises. He spoke to all without distinction: the great and the lowly, the rich young man and the poor widow, the powerful and the weak; he brought God’s mercy and forgiveness; he healed, he comforted, he understood; he gave hope; he brought to all the presence of God who cares for every man and every woman, just as a good father and a good mother care for each one of their children.

God does not wait for us to go to him but it is he who moves towards us, without calculation, without quantification. That is what God is like. He always takes the first step, he comes towards us.

Jesus lived the daily reality of the most ordinary people: he was moved as he faced the crowd that seemed like a flock without a shepherd; he wept before the sorrow that Martha and Mary felt at the

death of their brother, Lazarus; he called a publican to be his disciple; he also suffered betrayal by a friend. In him God has given us the certitude that he is with us, he is among us. “Foxes”, he, Jesus, said, “have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20). Jesus has no house, because his house is the people, it is we who are his dwelling place, his mission is to open God’s doors to all, to be the presence of God’s love.

In Holy Week we live the crowning moment of this journey, of this plan of love that runs through the entire history of the relations between God and humanity. Jesus enters Jerusalem to take his last step with which he sums up the whole of his existence. He gives himself without reserve, he keeps nothing for himself, not even life. At the Last Supper, with his friends, he breaks the bread and passes the cup round “for us”. The Son of God offers himself to us, he puts his Body and his Blood into our hands, so as to be with us always, to dwell among us. And in the Garden of Olives, and likewise in the trial before Pilate, he puts up no resistance, he gives himself; he is the suffering Servant, foretold by Isaiah, who empties himself, even unto death (cf. Is 53:12).

Jesus does not experience this love that leads to his sacrifice passively or as a fatal destiny. He does not of course conceal his deep human distress as he faces a violent death, but with absolute trust commends himself to the Father. Jesus gave himself up to death voluntarily in order to reciprocate the love of God the Father, in perfect union with his will, to demonstrate his love for us. On the Cross Jesus “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Each one of us can say: “he loved me and gave himself for me”. Each one can say this “for me”.

What is the meaning of all this for us? It means that this is my, your and our road too. Living Holy Week, following Jesus not only with the emotion of the heart; living Holy Week, following Jesus means learning to come out of ourselves — as I said last Sunday — in order to go to meet others, to go towards the outskirts of existence, to be the first to take a step towards our brothers and our sisters, especially those who are the most distant, those who are forgotten, those who are most in need of understanding, comfort and help. There is such a great need to bring the living presence of Jesus, merciful and full of love!

Living Holy Week means entering ever more deeply into the logic of God, into the logic of the Cross, which is not primarily that of suffering and death, but rather that of love and of the gift of self which brings life. It means entering into the logic of the Gospel. Following and accompanying Christ, staying with him, demands “coming out of ourselves”, requires us to be outgoing; to come out of ourselves, out of a dreary way of living faith that has become a habit, out of the temptation to withdraw into our own plans which end by shutting out God’s creative action.

God came out of himself to come among us, he pitched his tent among us to bring to us his mercy that saves and gives hope. Nor must we be satisfied with staying in the pen of the 99 sheep if we want to follow him and to remain with him; we too must “go out” with him to seek the lost sheep, the one that has strayed the furthest. Be sure to remember: coming out of ourselves, just as

Jesus, just as God came out of himself in Jesus and Jesus came out of himself for all of us.

Someone might say to me: “but Father, I don’t have time”, “I have so many things to do”, “it’s difficult”, “what can I do with my feebleness and my sins, with so many things?”. We are often satisfied with a few prayers, with a distracted and sporadic participation in Sunday Mass, with a few charitable acts; but we do not have the courage “to come out” to bring Christ to others. We are a bit like St Peter. As soon as Jesus speaks of his Passion, death and Resurrection, of the gift of himself, of love for all, the Apostle takes him aside and reproaches him. What Jesus says upsets his plans, seems unacceptable, threatens the security he had built for himself, his idea of the Messiah. And Jesus looks at his disciples and addresses to Peter what may possibly be the harshest words in the Gospels: “Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Mk 8:33). God always thinks with mercy: do not forget this. God always thinks mercifully. He is the merciful Father! God thinks like the father waiting for the son and goes to meet him, he spots him coming when he is still far off....

What does this mean? That he went every day to see if his son was coming home: this is our merciful Father. It indicates that he was waiting for him with longing on the terrace of his house. God thinks like the Samaritan who did not pass by the unfortunate man, pitying him or looking at him from the other side of the road, but helped him without asking for anything in return; without asking whether he was a Jew, a pagan or a Samaritan, whether he was rich or poor: he asked for nothing. He went to help him: God is like this. God thinks like the shepherd who lays down his life in order to defend and save his sheep.

Holy Week is a time of grace which the Lord gives us *to open the doors* of our heart, of our life, of our parishes — what a pity so many parishes are closed! — of the movements, of the associations; and “to come out” in order to meet others, to make ourselves close, to bring them the light and joy of our faith. To come out always! And to do so with God’s love and tenderness, with respect and with patience, knowing that God takes our hands, our feet, our heart, and guides them and makes all our actions fruitful.

I hope that we all will live these days well, following the Lord courageously, carrying within us a ray of his love for all those we meet.

Greetings:

Heartfelt greetings to the English-speaking pilgrims, especially the large group of university students taking part in the international UNIV Congress here in Rome. I extend a warm welcome to the pilgrims from England, Ireland, the Philippines and the United States of America. I invite all of you to enter fully into the spirit of Holy Week, following in the footsteps of Jesus and bringing the light of his love to everyone you meet. Happy Easter!

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