



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 February 2024*

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 7. *Sorrow*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our itinerary of catechesis on vices and virtues, today we will look at a rather ugly vice, sadness, understood as a despondency of the soul, a constant affliction that prevents people from feeling joy at their own existence.

First and foremost, it must be noted that, with regard to sadness, the Fathers had made an important distinction: There is, in fact, a sadness that befits Christian life, and that by God's grace, can be changed into joy. Obviously, this should not be rejected and is part of the journey of conversion. But there is a second kind of sadness that *creeps into the soul and prostrates it into a state of despondency*: it is this second kind of sadness that must be resolutely and assiduously fought, because it comes from the evil one. This distinction can also be seen in [the letter of] Saint Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians: "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor 7:10).

There is, therefore, a friendly sadness that leads us to salvation. Think of the prodigal son from the parable: when he reaches the depths of his degeneracy, he feels great bitterness, and this prompts him to come to his senses and to decide to return home to his father (cf. *Lk 15:11-20*). It is a grace to lament over one's own sins, to remember the state of grace from which we have fallen, to weep because we have lost the purity in which God dreamed of us.

But there is a second sadness, which is instead an *ailment of the soul*. It arises in the human heart when a desire or hope vanishes. Here we can refer to the account of the disciples of Emmaus. Those two disciples leave Jerusalem with a disappointed heart, and they confide to the stranger who at one point accompanies them: "We had hoped that he — Jesus — was the one to redeem Israel" (*Lk 24:21*). The dynamic of sadness is linked to the *experience of loss*. Hopes arise in the heart of man, which are sometimes dashed. It can be the desire to possess something that instead we are unable to obtain, but it can also be something important, such as an emotional loss. When this happens, it is as if man's heart falls from a precipice, and the emotions he feels are discouragement, weakness of spirit, depression and anguish. We all go through ordeals that generate sadness in us, because life makes us conceive dreams that are then shattered. In this situation, after a time of turmoil, some cling to hope, but others wallow in melancholy, allowing it to fester in their hearts. Does one take pleasure in this? See: sadness is like *the pleasure of non-pleasure* ; it is like taking a bitter candy, without sugar, unpleasant, and sucking on that candy. Sadness is taking pleasure in non-pleasure.

The monk Evagrius recounts that all vices aim at pleasure, however ephemeral it may be, whereas sadness enjoys the opposite: *lulling oneself into endless sadness*. Some prolonged griefs, in which a person continues to expand the void of one who is no longer there, are not proper to life in the Spirit. Certain bitter resentments, where a person always has a claim in mind that makes them take on the guise of the victim, do not produce a healthy life in us, let alone a Christian one. There is something in everyone's past that needs to be healed. Sadness can turn from being a natural emotion into an evil state of mind.

Sadness is a cunning demon. The Desert Fathers described it as a worm of the heart, which erodes and hollows out its host. This is a good image: it helps us understand. A worm in the heart that consumes and hollows out its host. So what should I do when I feel sad? Stop and look: is this a good sadness? Is it a sadness that is not so good? And react according to the nature of the sadness. Do not forget that sadness can be a very bad thing that leads us to pessimism, that leads us to a selfishness that is difficult to cure.

Brothers and sisters, we must beware of this sadness and think that Jesus brings us the joy of resurrection. As much as life may be filled with contradictions, defeated desires, unrealized dreams, lost friendships, thanks to Jesus' resurrection we can believe that *all will be saved*. Jesus rose again not only for himself, but also for us, to *redeem all the happiness* that has remained unfulfilled in our lives. Faith casts out fear, and the resurrection of Christ removes sadness like the

stone from the tomb. For a Christian every day is an exercise in resurrection. In his famous novel, “The Diary of a Country Priest”, Georges Bernanos, has the parish priest of Torcy say this: “Joy is in the gift of the Church, whatever joy is possible for this sad world to share. Whatever you did against the Church, has been done against joy”. And another French writer, León Bloy, left us this wonderful phrase: “The only real sadness [...] is not to become a saint.”

May the Spirit of the Risen Jesus help us to defeat sorrow with holiness.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, Denmark, Malta and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

And let us not forget about the wars, let us not forget tormented Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, the Rohingyas, the many, many wars that are everywhere. Let us pray for peace. War is always a defeat, always. Let us pray for peace. We need peace!

Lastly as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. May Our Lady of Lourdes, whom we will celebrate next week, accompany your journey with maternal tenderness. I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our catechesis on the virtues and the vices, we now centre our attention on spiritual sadness. Saint Paul speaks of a “godly grief” and a “worldly grief” (2 *Cor* 7:10). The former prompts conversion, enabling us to cling to hope and, therefore, leads to joy. The latter stems from dashed hopes and disappointments, eroding the soul with discouragement and sadness. Unlike most vices that seek fleeting pleasures, sadness indulges itself by wallowing in sorrow, hindering spiritual growth. As an antidote to this kind of despondency, the Desert Fathers recommended embracing Christ’s resurrection; for the risen Jesus redeems all the happiness that has remained unfulfilled in our lives. May faith cast out fear and Christ’s resurrection remove sadness like the stone before his tomb.
