



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO CARPI AND MIRANDOLA

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Piazza Martiri (Carpi)
Fifth Sunday of Lent, 2 April 2017*

[Multimedia]

Today's readings tell us of the God of life, who conquers death. Let us pause in particular on the last of the miraculous signs which Jesus performs before his Easter, at the sepulchre of his friend, Lazarus.

Everything appears to have ended there: the tomb is sealed by a great stone; there is only weeping and desolation there. Even Jesus is shaken by the dramatic mystery of the loss of a dear person: "He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (Jn 11:33). Then "Jesus wept" (v. 35) and went to the sepulchre, the Gospel says, "deeply moved again" (v. 38). This is God's heart: far from evil but close to those who are suffering. He does not make evil disappear magically, but he endures the suffering; he makes it his own and transforms it; he abides it.

We notice, however, that amid the general despair over the death of Lazarus, Jesus does not allow himself to be transported by despair. Even while suffering himself, he asks that people believe steadfastly. He does not close himself within his weeping but, moved, he makes his way to the sepulchre. He does not allow the resigned, emotional atmosphere that surrounds him to seize him, but rather, prays with trust and says, "Father, I thank thee" (v. 41). Thus, in the mystery of suffering, before which thoughts and progress are crushed like flies against glass, Jesus offers us the example of how to conduct ourselves. He does not run away from suffering, which is part of this life, but he does not allow himself to be held captive by pessimism.

A great “*encounter-clash*” thus occurred at that sepulchre. *On the one hand, there is the great disappointment*, the precariousness of our mortal life which, pierced by anguish over death, often experiences defeat, an interior darkness which seems insurmountable. Our soul, created for life, suffers upon hearing that its thirst for eternal good is oppressed by an ancient and dark evil. On the one hand, there is this defeat of the sepulchre. *But on the other, there is the hope* that conquers death and evil, and which has a name: the name of hope is Jesus.

He neither brings a bit of comfort nor some remedy to prolong life, but rather, proclaims: “*I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*”, (v. 25). It is for this reason that he says decisively, “Take away the stone” (v. 39) and he calls to Lazarus, “Come out” (v. 43).

Dear brothers and sisters, we too are called to decide on which side to stand. One can stand *on the side of the sepulchre* or *on the side of Jesus*. There are those who allow themselves to be closed within their pain and those who open up to hope. There are those who remain trapped among the ruins of life, and those who, like you, with God’s help, pick up the ruins of life and rebuild with patient hope.

In facing life’s great ‘whys?’, we have two paths: either stay and wistfully contemplate past and present sepulchres, or allow Jesus to approach our sepulchres. Yes, because each one of us already has a small sepulchre, some area that has somewhat died within our hearts; a wound, a wrongdoing endured or inflicted, an unrelenting resentment, a regret that keeps coming back, a sin we cannot overcome. Today, let us identify these little sepulchres that we have inside, and let us invite Jesus *into them*. It is curious, but we often prefer to be alone in the dark caves within us rather than invite Christ inside them. We are tempted to always seek [solutions for] ourselves, brooding and sinking into anguish, licking our wounds, instead of going to him, who says, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”, (Mt 11:28). Let us not be held captive by the temptation to remain alone and discouraged, crying about what is happening to us. Let us not give in to the useless and inconclusive logic of fear, resignedly repeating that everything is going badly and nothing is as it once was. This is the *sepulchral atmosphere*. The Lord instead wishes to open the path of life, that of encounter with him, of trust in him, of the *resurrection of the heart*, the way of: “Arise, Arise, come out”. This is what the Lord asks of us, and he is by our side to do so.

Thus, we hear directed to each one of us Jesus’ words to Lazarus: “Come out”. Come out from the gridlock of hopeless sadness; unwrap the bandages of fear that impede the journey, the laces of the weaknesses and anxieties that constrain you; reaffirm that God unties the knots. By following Jesus, we learn not to knot our lives around problems which become tangled. There will always be problems, always, and when we solve one, another one duly arrives. We can however, find *a new stability*, and this stability is Jesus himself. This stability is called Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life. With him, joy abides in our hearts, hope is reborn, suffering is transformed into

peace, fear into trust, hardship into an offering of love. And even though burdens will not disappear, there will always be his uplifting hand, his encouraging Word saying to all of us, to each of us: “Come out! Come to me!”. He tells all of us: “Do not be afraid”.

Today, just like then, Jesus says to us to: “take away the stone”. However burdensome the past, great the sin, weighty the shame, let us never bar the Lord’s entrance. Let us, before him, remove that stone which prevents him from entering. This is the favourable time to remove our sin, our attachment to worldly vanity, the pride that blocks our souls, so much hostility among us, in families.... This is the favourable time for removing all these things.

Visited and liberated by Jesus, we ask for the grace to be *witnesses of life* in this world that thirsts for it, witnesses who spark and rekindle God’s hope in hearts weary and laden with sadness. Our message is the joy of the living Lord, who says again today, as he did to Ezekiel, “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people (Ez 37:12).