The Holy See

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Basilica

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, 13 November 2022

[**Multimedia**]

While some were speaking of the outward beauty of the Temple and admiring its stones, Jesus draws attention to the troubled and dramatic events that mark human history. The Temple built by human hands will pass away, like everything else in this world, but it is important to be able to discern the times in which we live, in order to remain disciples of the Gospel even amid the upheavals of history.

To show us the path to such discernment, the Lord offers us two exhortations: *beware that you are not led astray* and *bear witness*.

The first thing that Jesus says to those listening to him, who are concerned about the "when" and the "how" of the terrifying events of which he speaks, is: "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and 'The time is near!' Do not go after them" (*Lk* 21:8). He then adds: "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified" (v. 9). This is consoling especially in the present time. But what does Jesus mean by not letting ourselves be led astray? He means avoiding the temptation to interpret dramatic events in a superstitious or catastrophic way, as if we are now close to the end of the world and it is useless to commit ourselves to doing good. If we think in this way, we let ourselves be guided by fear, and we may end up looking for answers with morbid curiosity in the ever-present chicanery of magic or horoscopes – today many Christians go visit magicians; they consult horoscopes as if they were

the voice of God. Or again, we rely on some last-minute “messiah” who peddles wild theories, usually conspiratorial and full of doom and gloom – conspiratorial theories are bad, they cause us a lot of harm. The Spirit of the Lord is not to be found in such approaches: nor is he found by going to a “guru” or in the conspiratorial spirit; the Lord is not there. Jesus warns us: “*Beware that you are not led astray”*. Do not be gullible or fearful, but learn how to interpret events with the eyes of faith, certain that by remaining close to God “not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18).

If human history is filled with dramatic events, situations of suffering, wars, revolutions and disasters, it is also true, Jesus tells us, that that is not the end of the world (cf. v. 9). It is not a good reason for letting ourselves be paralyzed by fear or for yielding to the defeatism of those who think that everything is lost and that it is useless to take an active part in life. A disciple of the Lord should not yield to resignation or give in to discouragement, even in the most difficult situations, for our God is the God of resurrection and hope, who always raises up: with him we can lift up our gaze and begin anew. Christians, then, in the face of trials – whatever cultural, historical or personal trial – ask: “What is the Lord saying to us through this moment of crisis?” – me too, I ask myself the same question today: What is the Lord saying to us, especially in the midst of this third world war? What is the Lord saying to us? And when evil events occur that give rise to poverty and suffering, the Christian asks: “What good can I concretely do?” Do not run away, ask yourself the question: What is the Lord saying to me and what good can I do?

It is not by chance that Jesus’ second exhortation, after “do not be led astray”, is positive. He says: “This will give you an opportunity to testify” (v. 13). An opportunity to testify. I want to emphasize this fine word: *opportunity*. It means having the chance to do something good, starting from our situation in life, even when it is not ideal. It is a skill typically Christian not to be a victim of everything that happens – a Christian is not a victim, and the psychology of victimhood is not good, it is harmful – but to seize the opportunity that lies hidden in everything that befalls us, the good – however small – that can come about even from negative situations. Every crisis is a possibility and offers opportunities for growth. Every crisis is an openness to the presence of God, openness to humanity. But what does the spirit of evil want us to do? He wants us to turn crisis into conflict, and conflict is always closed in, without a horizon; a dead-end. No. Let us experience a crisis like human persons, like Christians, let us not turn it into conflict, because every crisis is a possibility and offers opportunities for growth. We realize this if we think back on our own history: in life, often our most important steps forward were taken in the midst of certain crises, in situations of trial, loss of control or insecurity. Then we understand the words of encouragement that Jesus today speaks directly to me, to you, to each one of us: when you see troubling events all around you, while wars and conflicts are on the rise, while earthquakes, famines and plagues are happening, what are you to do; what do I do? Do you distract yourself in order not to think about it? Do you amuse yourself in order not to get involved? Do you turn away in order not to see? Do you take the road of worldliness, of not being proactive and of not taking care of these dramatic situations? Do you simply resign yourself to what is happening? Or do these situations become opportunities to bear witness to the Gospel? Each one of us should ask himself or herself:

in the midst of these calamities, in the midst of this terrible third world war, in the midst of hunger affecting many people, especially children: can I spend my money, my life and its meaning without being courageous and moving forward?

Brothers and sisters, on this *World Day of the Poor* God's word is a forceful admonition to break through that inner deafness, which we all suffer from, and which prevents us from hearing the stifled cry of pain of the frailest. Nowadays we too live in troubled societies and are witnesses, as the Gospel told us, to scenes of violence – we only have to think about the cruelty that the people of Ukraine are experiencing – injustice and persecution; in addition, we must face the crisis generated by climate change and the pandemic, which has left in its wake not only physical, but also psychological, economic and social maladies. Even now, brothers and sisters, we see peoples rising up against peoples and we witness with trepidation the vast expansion of conflicts and the calamity of war, which causes the death of so many innocent people and multiplies the poison of hatred. Today also, much more than in the past, many of our brothers and sisters, sorely tested and disheartened, migrate in search of hope, and many people experience insecurity due to the lack of employment or unjust and undignified working conditions. Today too, the poor pay the heaviest price in any crisis. Yet if our heart is deadened and indifferent, we cannot hear their faint cry of pain, we cannot cry with them and for them, we cannot see how much loneliness and anguish also lie hidden in the forgotten corners of our cities. We have to go the corners of the cities, for in these hidden and dark corners we see great misery and pain and abject poverty.

Let us take to heart the clear and unmistakable summons in the Gospel not to be led astray. Let us not listen to prophets of doom. Let us not be enchanted by the sirens of populism, which exploit people's real needs by facile and hasty solutions. Let us not follow the false "messiahs" who, in the name of profit, proclaim recipes useful only for increasing the wealth of a few, while condemning the poor to the margins of society. Instead, let us bear witness. Let us light candles of hope in the midst of darkness. Amid dramatic situations, let us seize opportunities to bear witness to the Gospel of joy and to build a fraternal world, or at least a bit more fraternal. Let us commit ourselves courageously to justice, the rule of law and peace, and stand always at the side of the weakest. Let us not step back to protect ourselves from history, but strive to give *this* moment of history, which we are experiencing, a different face.

How do we find the strength for all this? In the Lord. By trusting in God our Father, who watches over us. If we open our hearts to him, he will strengthen within us the capacity to love. This is the way: to grow in love. Indeed, after describing scenarios of violence and terror, Jesus concludes by saying, "Not a hair of your head will perish" (v. 18). But what does this mean? It means that he is with us; he walks with us to guide us. Do I have this conviction? Are you convinced that the Lord walks with you? We should always repeat this to ourselves, especially at times of greatest trouble: God is a Father, and he is at my side. He knows and loves me; he does not sleep, but watches over me and cares for me. If I stay close to him, not a hair of my head will perish. And how do I respond to this? By looking at our brothers and sisters in need; by looking at the throw away

culture that discards the poor and people with few possibilities; a culture that discards the old and unborn… by looking at all of them; as a Christian, what should I do in this moment?

Since he loves us, let us resolve to love him in the most abandoned of his children. The Lord is there. There is an old tradition, even in some Italian regions, and I am sure some people still follow it: leaving an empty chair for the Lord at the Christmas dinner, and believing that he will surely come knocking at the door in the person of a poor person in need. Does your heart have a space for such persons? Is there a place in my heart for such people? Or are we too busy attending to our friends, attending social events and other engagements which will never let us have a space for such people. Let us care for the poor, in whom we find Jesus, who became poor for our sake (cf. *2 Cor* 8:9). He identifies with the poor. Let us feel challenged to care for them, lest even a hair of their head perish. Let us not be content, like the people in the Gospel, to admire the beautiful stones of the temple, while failing to recognize *God's true temple*, our fellow men and women, especially the poor, in whose face, in whose history, in whose wounds, we encounter Jesus. He told us so. Let us never forget it.

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