



WORLD DAY OF THE POOR: HOLY MASS



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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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Let us look at three things Jesus does in today's Gospel.

First: while it is still day, he “leaves”. He leaves the crowds at the height of his success, acclaimed for his multiplication of the loaves. Though the disciples wanted to bask in the glory, he tells them to go ahead and then dismisses the crowd (cf. *Mt 14:22-23*). Sought by the people, he goes off by himself; as the excitement was winding down, he goes up the mountain to pray. Then, in the dead of night, he comes down and goes to the disciples, walking on the wind-swept waters. In all of this, Jesus goes against the current: first, he leaves behind success, and then tranquillity. He teaches us *the courage to leave*: to leave behind the success that swells the heart and the tranquillity that deadens the soul.

To go where? To God by praying, and to those in need by loving. These are the true treasures in life: God and our neighbour. And this is the road Jesus tells us to take: to go up to God and to come

down to our brothers and sisters. He tears us away from grazing undisturbed in the comfortable meadows of life, from living a life of ease amid little daily pleasures. His disciples are not meant for the carefree calm of a normal life. Like Jesus, they make their way travelling light, ready to leave momentary glories behind, careful not to cling to fleeting goods. Christians know that their homeland is elsewhere, that they are even now – as Saint Paul reminds us in the second reading – “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (cf. *Eph 2:19*). They are used to being wayfarers. We do not live to accumulate; our glory lies in leaving behind the things that pass away in order to hold on to those that last. Let us ask God to make us like the Church described in the first reading: always on the move, good at leaving and faithful in serving (cf. *Acts 28:11-14*). Rouse us, Lord, from our idle calm, from the quiet lull of our safe harbours. Set us free from the moorings of self-absorption that weigh life down; free us from constantly seeking success. Teach us, Lord, to know how to “leave” in order to set out on the road you have shown us: to God and to our neighbour.

The second thing: in the heart of the night, Jesus *reassures*. He goes to his disciples, in the dark, walking “on the sea” (v. 25). The “sea” in this case was really a lake, but the idea of the “sea”, with its murky depths, evokes the forces of evil. Jesus, in effect, goes to meet his disciples by trampling on the malign foes of humanity. And this is the meaning of the sign: rather than a triumphant display of power, it is a revelation of the reassuring certainty that Jesus, and Jesus alone, triumphs over our greatest enemies: the devil, sin, death, fear, worldliness. Today, and to us, he says: “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” (v. 27).

The boat of our life is often storm-tossed and buffeted by winds. Even when the waters are calm, they quickly grow agitated. When we are caught up in those storms, they seem to be our only problem. But the issue is not the momentary storm, but how we are navigating through life. The secret of navigating well is to invite Jesus on board. The rudder of life must be surrendered to him, so that he can steer the route. He alone gives life in death and hope in suffering; he alone heals our heart by his forgiveness and frees us from fear by instilling confidence. Today, let us invite Jesus into the boat of our life. Like the disciples, we will realize that once he is on board, the winds die down (cf. v. 32) and there can be no shipwreck. With him on board, there will never be a shipwreck! Only with Jesus do we then become capable of offering reassurance. How greatly we need people who can comfort others not with empty words, but with words of life, with deeds of life. In the name of Jesus, we are able to offer true comfort. It is not empty words of encouragement, but the presence of Jesus that grants strength. *Reassure* us, Lord: comforted by you, we will be able to bring true comfort to others.

The third thing Jesus does: in the midst of the storm, *he stretches out his hand* (cf. v. 31). He takes hold of Peter who, in his fear and doubt, was sinking, and cried out: “Lord, save me!” (v. 30). We can put ourselves in Peter’s place: we are people of little faith, pleading for salvation. We are wanting in true life and we need the outstretched hand of the Lord to draw us out from evil. This is the beginning of faith: to cast off the pride that makes us feel self-sufficient, and to realize that we are in need of salvation. Faith grows in this climate, to which we adapt ourselves by taking our place beside those who do not set themselves on a pedestal but are needy and cry out for help. This is why it is important for all of us *to live our faith in contact with those in need*. This is not a sociological option, the fashion of a single pontificate; it is a theological requirement. It entails acknowledging that we are beggars pleading for salvation, brothers and sisters of all, but especially of the poor whom the Lord loves. In this way, we embrace the spirit of the Gospel. “The spirit of poverty and of love – says the Council – is in fact the glory and witness of the Church of Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 88).

Jesus heard the cry of Peter. Let us ask for the grace to hear the cry of all those tossed by the waves of life. The *cry of the poor*: it is the stifled cry of the unborn, of starving children, of young people more used to the explosion of bombs than happy shouts of the playground. It is the cry of the elderly, cast off and abandoned to themselves. It is the cry of all those who face the storms of life without the presence of a friend. It is the cry of all those forced to flee their homes and native land for an uncertain future. It is the cry of entire peoples, deprived even of the great natural resources at their

disposal. It is the cry of every Lazarus who weeps while the wealthy few feast on what, in justice, belongs to all. Injustice is the perverse root of poverty. The cry of the poor daily grows louder but is heard less and less. Every day that cry gets louder, but every day heard less, drowned out by the din of the rich few, who grow ever fewer and more rich.

In the face of contempt for human dignity, we often remain with arms folded or stretched out as a sign of our frustration before the grim power of evil. Yet we Christians cannot stand with arms folded in indifference, or with arms outstretched in helplessness. No. As believers, we must *stretch out our hands*, as Jesus does with us. The cry of the poor finds a hearing with God. Yet I ask, does it with us? Do we have eyes to see, ears to hear, hands outstretched to offer help? Or do we keep repeating: "Come back tomorrow"? "Christ himself appeals to the charity of his disciples in the person of the poor" (*Gaudium et Spes*, loc. cit.). He asks us to recognize him in all those who are hungry and thirsty, in the stranger and those stripped of dignity, in the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt*25:35-36).

The Lord stretches out his hand, freely and not out of duty. And so it must be with us. We are not called to do good only to those who like us. That is normal, but Jesus demands that we do something more (cf. *Mt*5:46): to give to those who have nothing to give back, to love *gratuitously* (cf. *Lk*6:32-36). Let us look around in our own day. For all that we do, do we ever do anything completely for free, something for a person who cannot repay us? That will be our outstretched hand, our true treasure in heaven.

Stretch out your hand to us, Lord, and take hold of us. Help us to love as you love. Teach us to leave behind all that is passing, to be a source of reassurance to those around us, and to give freely to all those in need. Amen.