The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS ***GENERAL AUDIENCE*** *Library of the Apostolic Palace*

Wednesday, 8 April 2020 [Multimedia]

Dear Brothers ad Sisters, Good morning,

In these weeks of anxiety over the pandemic that is causing so much suffering in the world, among the many questions that we ask ourselves, there may be some about God: what is he doing faced with our suffering? Where is he when everything is going wrong? Why doesn't he resolve the problems immediately? These are the questions we ask about God.

The narrative of the Passion of Jesus that accompanies us during these Holy Days can be of solace. There too in fact, many questions arise. After welcoming Jesus triumphantly in Jerusalem, the people asked themselves whether he would finally redeem them from their enemies (cf. *Lk* 24:21). They expected a powerful and triumphant sword-bearing Messiah. Instead, a meek and humble hearted one arrives who calls for conversion and mercy. And the very multitude that had previously raised hosannas to him, cries, "Let him be crucified" (*Mt* 27:23). Confused and frightened, those who had followed him, abandon him. They think that if this is Jesus' fate, then he is not the Messiah because God is strong and God is invincible.

However, if we continue to read the narrative of the Passion, we come to a surprising fact. When Jesus dies, the Roman centurion who was a nonbeliever; he was not a Jew but a Gentile who had seen him suffer on the cross and had heard him forgive everyone, who had touched his boundless love with his own hand, professes: "Truly this man was the son of God" (*Mk* 15:39). He says the very opposite of what the others say. He says that God is there, that he is *truly* God.

We can ask ourselves today: what is the true face of God? We usually project onto him who we are, to the fullest: our success, our sense of justice and also our scorn. However, the Gospel tells us that God is not like this, He is different and we could not come to know him by relying on our own strength. This is why he drew himself nearer. He came to us and precisely on Easter he revealed himself completely. And where did he reveal himself completely? On the cross. It is there that we learn the features of God's face.

Let us not forget, brothers and sisters, that the cross is *God's throne*. It will do us good to look at the Crucifix in silence and to see who our Lord is: He is the one who does not point his finger at anyone, not even to those who are crucifying him, but rather opens his arms wide to everyone; who does not crush us with his glory but allows himself to be stripped for us; who does not love us in word but rather gives us life in silence; who does not force us but frees us; who does not treat us as strangers, but rather takes upon himself our evil, he takes upon himself our sins. He does this to free us from prejudice against God; let us look at the Crucifix. And then let us open the Gospel. These days, while we are all locked down in quarantine at home, let us take these two things in our hands: the Crucifix, let us look at it, and the Gospel, let us open it. This will be for us, so to speak, like a great domestic liturgy because we cannot go to Church these days. Crucifix and Gospel!

In the Gospel, we read that when the people go to Jesus to make him king, for example after the multiplication of the loaves, he withdraws (cf. *Jn* 6:15). And when the demons want to reveal his Divine Majesty, he silences them (cf. *Mk* 1:24-25). Why? Because Jesus does not want to be misunderstood. He does not want the people to confuse the true God who is *humble love*, with a false god, a worldly god who puts on a show and imposes himself with his strength. He is not an idol. He is God-made-man like each of us, and he expresses himself like a man but with the strength of his divinity. Instead, when is the identity of Jesus solemnly proclaimed in the Gospel? When the centurion says: "*Truly he was the Son of God*". That is when it is said, as soon as he has given his life on the Cross, because one can no longer be mistaken: one can see that God is *omnipotent in love* and in no another way. It is his nature because he is made that way. He is Love.

You might object: "What need do I have for such a weak God who dies? I would prefer a strong God, a powerful God". But you know, the power of this world passes, whereas love remains. Only love safeguards the life we have because it embraces our fragility and transforms it. It is God's love that healed our sin with his forgiveness at Easter, who turned death into a passage of life, who changed our fear into trust, our anxiety into hope. Easter tells us that God can change everything into good; that with him, we can truly trust that everything will go well. And this is not an illusion because Jesus' death and Resurrection is not an illusion: it was a truth! That is why on Easter morning we are told: "Do not be afraid!" (cf. *Mt* 28:5). And the anxious questions about evil do not fade at once, but in the Risen One, they find a solid foundation that allows us not to be shipwrecked.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus changed history by drawing himself near to us and, though still marked by evil, turned it into the history of salvation. By offering his life on the cross, Jesus also defeated death. From the open heart of the Crucified One, God's love reaches each one of us. We can change our histories by drawing near to him, welcoming the salvation that he offers us. Brothers and sisters, let us open our whole heart to him in prayer, this week, these days: with the Crucifix and with the Gospel. Do not forget: Crucifix and Gospel. This shall be a domestic liturgy.

Let us open our whole heart to him in prayer. Let us allow his gaze to rest upon us and we will understand that we are not alone, but loved because the Lord does not abandon us and he does not forget us, ever. And with these thoughts, I wish you a Holy Week and a Holy Easter.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. May this Holy Week lead us to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. May God bless you!

Lastly, I offer a greeting to young people, the sick, the elderly and newlyweds. May the Passion of the Lord, the culmination of the glorious triumph of Easter, be for each of you, the wellspring of hope and comfort in moments of trial. I impart my Blessing on everyone.

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