



The Holy See

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Basilica

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[Multimedia]

The words we have just heard could evoke feelings of anguish, whereas they are in fact a great proclamation of hope. While Jesus seems to be describing the state of mind of those who have witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and think that the end has come, he announces something extraordinary: in the very hour of darkness and desolation, just when everything seems to collapse, God comes, God draws near, God gathers us together to save us.

Jesus invites us to take a deeper look, to have eyes capable of “reading within” the events of history. In this way, we discover that even in the anguish of our hearts and of our times, an unshakable hope shines forth. On this World Day of the Poor, let us pause to consider two realities always at war upon the battlefield of our hearts: anguish and hope.

First of all, *anguish*. Feelings of anguish are widespread in our age, given that social media amplifies problems and wounds, making the world more insecure and the future more uncertain. Even today’s Gospel opens with an image that seems to project the tribulation of the people upon the cosmos through the use of apocalyptic language: “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken...” and so on (*Mk 13:24-25*).

If we limit our gaze to the narrative of events, we allow anguish to gain the upper hand. Indeed,

even today we see the “sun darken” and the “moon fade” when we contemplate the famine that afflicts so many of our brothers and sisters who have no food to eat, and when we see the horrors of war or see the death of the innocent. Faced with this scenario, we run the risk of falling into despondency and failing to recognise the presence of God within the drama of history. In so doing, we condemn ourselves to powerlessness. We witness the growing anguish around us brought about by the suffering of the poor, but we slip into the resigned way of thinking of those who, moved by convenience or laziness, think “that’s life” and “there is nothing I can do about it”. Thus, Christian faith itself is reduced to a harmless devotion that does not disturb the powers that be and is incapable of generating a serious commitment to charity. While one part of the world is condemned to live in the slums of history, while inequalities grow and the economy punishes the weakest, while society devotes itself to the idolatry of money and consumption, it so happens that the poor and marginalised have no choice but to continue to wait (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 54).

Yet it is precisely here, in the midst of that apocalyptic scene, that Jesus kindles *hope*. He opens up the horizon, widens our gaze, so that even in the precariousness and pain of the world, we may learn to grasp the presence of God’s love, which comes close to us, does not abandon us, and acts for our salvation. In fact, just as the sun darkens and the moon stops shining and the stars fall from the sky, the Gospel says, “they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (*Mk* 13:26-27).

With these words, Jesus alludes to his death that will take place shortly thereafter. Indeed, on Calvary the sun will fade and night will descend upon the world. In that very moment, however, the Son of Man will be seen upon the clouds, for the power of his resurrection will break the chains of death, the eternal life of God will rise from the darkness and a new world will be born from the rubble of a history ravaged by evil.

Brothers and sisters, this is the hope that Jesus wants to give us and he does so through a beautiful image. He asks us to consider the fig tree: “As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near” (*Mk* 13:28). We too are called to interpret the signs of our life here on earth: where there seems to be only injustice, pain and poverty – in the very drama of that moment – the Lord draws near to free us from slavery and in order to make life shine (cf. *Mk* 13:29). He draws near to others through our Christian closeness, our Christian fraternity. It is not a matter of throwing a coin into the hands of someone in need. To those who give alms, I ask two things: “Do you touch people’s hands or do you throw a coin at them without touching them? Do you look into the eyes of the person whom you help or do you look away?”.

We, in turn, as his disciples, can sow hope in this world through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can and must enkindle lights of justice and solidarity even as the shadows of our closed world deepen (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 9-55). We are the ones that must make his grace shine forth through lives steeped in compassion and charity that become signs of the Lord’s presence, always close to

the suffering of the poor in order to heal their wounds and transform their fortune.

Brothers and sisters, let us not forget that Christian hope, fulfilled in Jesus and realized in his kingdom, needs us and our commitment, it needs our faith expressed in works of charity, and it needs Christians who do not look the other way. I was looking at a photograph that a Roman photographer took: an adult couple, quite elderly, were coming out of a restaurant in winter; the woman was well covered with a fur coat, as was the man. At the door, there was a poor woman, lying on the floor, begging for alms, and both were looking the other way. This happens every day. Let us ask ourselves: do I look the other way when I see the poverty, the needs, or the pain of others? A twentieth-century theologian said that the Christian faith must generate in us “a mysticism with open eyes,” not a spirituality that flees from the world but – on the contrary – a faith that opens its eyes to the sufferings of the world and the unhappiness of the poor in order to show Christ’s compassion. Do I feel the same compassion as the Lord before the poor, before those who have no work, who have no food, who are marginalized by society? We must look not only at the great problems of world poverty, but at the small things all of us can do each day by our lifestyle; by our attention to and caring for the environment in which we live; by the tenacious pursuit of justice; by sharing our goods with those who are poorer; by a social and political engagement in order to improve the world that surrounds us. It may seem a small thing to us, but the small things that we do will be like the first leaves sprouting on the fig tree, our little actions will be a foretaste of the summer that is near.

Dear friends, on this World Day of the Poor, I would like to share a warning from Cardinal Martini. He insisted that we must avoid considering the Church as separate from the poor as if the Church existed as an independent reality that must then care for the poor. The reality is that we become the Church of Jesus to the extent that we serve the poor, because only in this way “does the Church ‘become’ herself, that is, the Church becomes a house open to all, a place of God’s compassion for the life of every individual” (C.M. Martini, *Città senza mura. Letters and speeches to the diocese* 1984, Bologna 1985, 350).

I say this to the Church, to Governments and to International Organizations. I say to everyone: please, let us not forget the poor.