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Holy Mass on the Fifth World Day of the Poor

At 10.00 this morning, 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Holy Father Francis presided at the Eucharistic Celebration in the Vatican Basilica on the occasion of the Fifth World Day of the Poor, attended by two thousand poor and destitute people, together with the volunteers who accompanied them and representatives of the numerous charitable organisations that assist them on a daily basis in the Rome area.

The following is the homily delivered by the Pope after the proclamation of the Gospel:

Homily of the Holy Father

The images that Jesus uses at the beginning of today's Gospel leave us bewildered: the sun darkened, the moon no longer giving light, stars falling and the powers of heaven shaken (cf. *Mk* 13:24-25). Yet the Lord then invites us to hope, for precisely in that moment of utter darkness, the Son of Man will come (cf. v. 26). Even now, we can perceive the signs of his coming, just as the leaves that appear on the fig tree make us realize that summer is at hand (cf. v. 28).

This Gospel passage helps us to interpret history in two of its aspects: *today's pain* and *tomorrow's hope*. It evokes all those painful contradictions in which humanity in every age is immersed, and, at the same time, the future of salvation that awaits us: the encounter with the Lord who comes to set us free from all evil. Let us consider these two aspects through the eyes of Jesus.

First: *today's pain*. We are part of a history marked by tribulation, violence, suffering and injustice, ever awaiting a liberation that never seems to arrive. Those who are most wounded, oppressed and even crushed, are the poor, the weakest links in the chain. The World Day of the Poor which we are celebrating asks us not to turn aside, not to be afraid to take a close look at the suffering of those most vulnerable. Today's Gospel has much to say to them. The sun of their life is often darkened by loneliness, the moon of their expectations has waned and the stars of their dreams have fallen into gloom; their lives have been shaken. All because of the poverty into which they are often forced, victims of injustice and the inequality of a throwaway society that hurries past

without seeing them and without scruple abandons them to their fate.

There is, however, another aspect: *tomorrow's hope*. Jesus wants to open our hearts to hope, to remove our anxiety and fear before the pain of the world. And so, he tells us that even as the sun grows dark and everything around us seems to be falling, he himself is drawing near. Amid the groans of our painful history, a future of salvation is beginning to blossom. Tomorrow's hope flowers amid today's pain. Indeed, God's salvation is not only a future promise, but is even now at work within our wounded history, spreading in the midst of the oppression and the injustice of our world. All of us have a wounded heart. Amid the tears of the poor, the kingdom of God is blossoming like the tender leaves of the tree and guiding history to its goal, to the final encounter with the Lord, the King of the universe who will definitively set us free.

At this point, let us ask: what is demanded of us as Christians in this situation? We are asked to *nurture tomorrow's hope by healing today's pain*. The two are linked: if you do not work to heal today's pain, it will be hard to have hope for tomorrow. The hope born of the Gospel has nothing to do with a passive expectation that things may be better tomorrow, but with making God's promise of salvation concrete today. Today and every day. Christian hope is not the naïve, even adolescent, optimism of those who hope that things may change – that won't happen – but in the meantime go on with life; it has to do with building daily, by concrete gestures, the kingdom of love, justice, and fraternity that Jesus inaugurated. Christian hope, for example, was not sown by the Levite and the priest who walked by the man wounded by the thieves. It was sown by a stranger, a Samaritan who stopped and did that (cf. *Lk 10:30-35*). And today it is as if the Church is saying: "Stop and sow hope amid poverty. Draw near to the poor and sow hope". Hope for that person, your hope and the hope of the Church. This is what is asked of us: to be, amid the ruins of the everyday world, tireless builders of hope; to be light as the sun grows dark, to be loving witnesses of compassion amid widespread disinterest; to be an attentive presence amid growing indifference. Witnesses of compassion. We will never be able to do good except by showing compassion. At most, we will do good things, but they do not touch the Christian way because they do not touch the heart. What touches the heart is compassion: we draw near, we feel compassion and we perform works of tender love. That is God's way of doing things: closeness, compassion and tenderness. That is what is being asked of us today.

Recently I was thinking about what a bishop close to the poor, and himself poor in spirit, Don Tonino Bello, used to say: "We cannot be content to hope; we have to organize hope". Unless our hope translates into decisions and concrete gestures of concern, justice, solidarity and care for our common home, the sufferings of the poor will not be relieved, the economy of waste that forces them to live on the margins will not be converted, their expectations will not blossom anew. We Christians, in particular, have to *organize hope* - this expression of Don Tonino Bello, to organize hope, is very fine – to make it concrete in our everyday lives, in our relationships, in our social and political commitments. I am reminded of the charitable works carried out by so many Christians, the work of the Office of the Papal Almoner... What are they doing there? They are organizing hope. Not giving a coin here and there, but organizing hope. This is what the Church is asking of us today.

Today Jesus offers us a simple yet eloquent image of hope. It is the image of the leaves of the fig tree, which quietly point to the approach of summer. Those leaves appear, Jesus says, when the branch becomes tender (cf. v. 28). Dear brothers and sisters, that is the word that makes hope blossom in the world and relieves the suffering of the poor: *tenderness*. Compassion that leads you to tenderness. We need to overcome our self-absorption, interior rigidity, which is the temptation nowadays, that of the "restorationists", who want a Church completely orderly, completely rigid: this is not of the Holy Spirit. We have to overcome this, in order to make hope blossom amid this rigidity. It is up to us to overcome the temptation to be concerned only about our own problems; we need to grow tender before the tragedies of our world, to share its pain. Like the tender leaves of a tree, we are called to absorb the pollution all around us and turn it into goodness. It is useless to keep talking about problems, to argue and to be scandalized – all of us can do that. What we need to do is imitate the leaves that daily, imperceptibly, turn dirty air into clean air. Jesus wants us to be "converters" of goodness: people who breathe the same heavy air as everyone else, but respond to evil with good (cf. *Rom 12:21*). People who act: by breaking bread with the hungry, working for justice, lifting up the poor and restoring their dignity. As the Samaritan did.

How lovely, evangelical and youthful is a Church ready to go out from herself and, like Jesus, proclaim good

news to the poor (cf. *Lk 4:18*). Let me pause at that last adjective: young. A Church that sows hope is young. A prophetic Church that, by her presence, says to the broken-hearted and the outcast of the world, "Take heart, the Lord is near. For you too, summer is being born in the depths of winter. From your pain, hope can arise". Brothers and sisters, let us bring this outlook of hope to our world. Let us bring it with tenderness to the poor, with closeness, with compassion, without judging them, for we will be judged. For there, with them, with the poor, is Jesus; because there, *in them*, is Jesus, who awaits us.
