

Homily for healing of members of the Pallottine Family

Cari Fratelli e Sorelle dell'Unione dell'Apostolato Cattolico
Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Pallottine Family all over the world,

A very fraternal welcome to all the members of the Pallottine Family from the spiritual centre of the entire Union of Catholic Apostolate. Welcome to all those who are present here today in our Church and welcome to all those who are accompanying us through internet. In view of communicating with as many people as possible, I preach this homily in Italian and English, part by part.

It is a matter of great joy that the entire Pallottine Family is united together today in prayer for our sick and deceased members, the victims of Coronavirus pandemic. We remember and pray for all those who are afflicted by pandemic, spiritually, psychologically and materially. Naturally, our heart goes out not only to the Pallottines but also to all people, especially the elderly, children and the most vulnerable persons in the society.

I appeal to all the members of our Pallottine Family, those who are participating in this moment of prayer and worship and those who are engaged in other pastoral activities, to raise your hearts in humble supplication to God to heal our members and all the people in the world from this deadly pandemic. May the Lord in his mercy grant eternal peace to all our members who lost their life due to Covid-19. We pray to God through the intercession of our holy Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti, on whose altar we celebrate the holy Mass today. We seek the intercession of Blessed Elizabeth Sanna, the handicapped mother, who understands what it means to suffer from poverty and loneliness. May our blessed Pallottine martyrs intercede with God for courage and serenity to meet with the present-day challenges.

There are two fundamental Christian virtues that we need at this difficult time: unflinching hope, rooted in a profound faith in God and the spirit of solidarity based on fraternal charity. These are the two virtues pointed out by Pope Francis during the Fifth catechesis on the Covid-19 pandemic, "To heal the world" in the light of the Gospel, the theological virtues and the principles of the Church's social doctrine". The Holy Father said: "In the midst of crises, a solidarity guided by faith enables us to translate the love of God in our globalised culture, not by building towers or walls..., but by interweaving communities and sustaining processes of growth that are truly human and solid...In the midst of crises and tempests, the Lord calls to us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked. May the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity".

Thus, as Pope Francis mentioned during his fifth Catechesis on "heal the world" in this time of pandemic, it is the time to destroy the walls created by human prejudices and limitations, and to build up solid human communities, rooted in fraternal solidarity guided by faith, thus translating the love of God into concrete actions of charity. The social teaching of the Church believes in the dignity of all human beings, whether they are rich or poor, white or black, leaved or ignorant, male or female. What we require is the creativity of the Holy Spirit that prompts new forms of hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity. The end result of such a way of being human and Christian in today's world would be the evolving of a new humanity, the creation of a more just society leading to a civilization of love. This would be the foundation of our unflinching hope for a new horizon.

Today's two readings are amazingly beautiful and relevant to the occasion. They also touch upon the two Christian virtues that we need so urgently: the unflinching hope rooted in faith and fraternal solidarity based on charity.

The first reading from the book of Isaiah is full of expressions of hope.

"The Lord God shall wipe away tears from every face, and the reproach of his people he shall take away from the whole earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.

And they shall say in that day: Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have patiently waited for him, we shall rejoice and be joyful in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:8-9).

The responsorial psalm, like the first reading from Isaiah, radiates full of hope and joy:

He has set me in a place of pasture. He has brought me up, on the water of refreshment:
He has converted my soul. He has led me on the paths of justice, for his own name's sake.

For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for you are with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me.

You have prepared a table before me against them that afflict me. You have anointed my head with oil.

And your mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days (Psalm 23:2-6).

"For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for you are with me" – this is the foundation for our hope that God will guide our history and destiny and bring good out of every difficult situation. "Do not fear" is a constant theme in the Bible. As we are living in the season of Advent, we do not fear because Immanuel, God-with-us is ever present in our human history, to save us.

The Gospel passage that we have heard today presents three elements: the habit of Jesus to withdraw to the mountain to be united with his Father, his mission of healing people of all infirmities and his compassion for the hungry people, leading to the miracle of the multiplication of the seven loaves and the fishes. These are the three elements that can illumine and guide our lives too during this pandemic: prayer, healing and concrete acts of mercy.

Going up the mountain and coming down the mountain have been two fundamental movements in the life and mission of Jesus. Jesus went up the mountain at the most significant moments of his life to be united and to be strengthened by the presence of his Father. Likewise, we are all called to go up the mountain as frequently as possible to contemplate the infinite love and mercy of God. Without prayer and contemplation, we will be lost. We will never find the inner resource to carry our daily cross. Therefore, the question is: are we men and women of prayer or are we all only busy persons filled with the daily worries of life? The second movement is that of coming down the mountain to respond to the cries of the people, filled with a spirit of compassion. This is also the true meaning of Christmas – the Son of God, becoming one of us, to take up our infirmities and give us the fullness of life of God.

The Gospel passage says: "And there came to him great multitudes, having with them the dumb, the blind, the lame, the maimed, and many others: and they cast them down at his feet, and he healed them. So that the multitudes marvelled seeing the dumb speak, the lame walk, and the blind see: and they glorified the God of Israel. And Jesus called together his disciples, and said: I have compassion on the multitudes, because they continue with me now three days, and have not what to eat, and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way". We too need compassion for the suffering people today: for the elderly persons who die alone, the families left behind without a father or mother, the medical doctors and nurses working day and night to save lives, the children having nothing to eat because their parents lost the work. We need members in our Religious Communities with the spirit of compassion to recognise that there are people going to bed hungry while we have food; we need priests who can respond to the spiritual and psychological hunger of persons and be willing to risk their own lives for the flock.

Brothers and Sisters, this time of pandemic is a great opportunity for a spiritual conversion. Following the example also of our Founder, St. Vincent, it is a call to us to become more prayer-centred, contemplative and mystic persons. It is also the moment to become compassionate persons who will not live a self-centred life but will try to become food for the hungry, water for the thirsty and health for the sick. This was the mission of Jesus, this was the mission of St. Vincent Pallotti. To become all things to all persons, following Jesus, the apostle of the Father.

As members of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, this is the spiritual and apostolic heritage that we have inherited from our Founder. The life of the Union must be marked by the Christian virtues contained in today's readings: the spirit of prayer, unending hope rooted in the profound faith in God, and the creativity of the Holy Spirit leading to universal fraternal solidarity with the poorest of the poor. The Union of Catholic Apostolate is not just a theological or juridical concept: it is Gospel lived in the day to day life of every one of us; it is the love of Christ in action.

We conclude with this prayer of Pope Francis to Mary for protection from Coronavirus:

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the Father's will
and to do what Jesus tells us:

He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us,
through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger,
O glorious and blessed Virgin Mary. Amen.

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