



The Holy See

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

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[Multimedia]

In today's Gospel, Jesus astounds both his contemporaries and us. While every else was praising the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, Jesus tells them that "one stone" will not be left "upon another" (Lk 21:6). Why does he speak these words about so sacred an institution, which was not merely a building but a unique religious symbol, a house for God and for the believing people? Why does he prophesy that the firm certitude of the people of God would collapse? Why, ultimately, does the Lord let our certitudes collapse, when our world has fewer and fewer of them?

Let us look for answers in the words of Jesus. He tells us that *almost* everything will pass away. Almost everything, but not *everything*. On this next to last Sunday in Ordinary Time, he explains that what will collapse and pass away are the *penultimate* things, not the ultimate ones: the temple, not God; kingdoms and human events, not humanity itself. The penultimate things, which often appear definitive but are not, pass away. They are majestic realities like our temples, and terrifying ones like earthquakes; they are signs in heaven and wars on the earth (cf. vv. 10-11). To us, these are front page news, but the Lord puts them on the second page. That which will never pass away remains on the front page: the living God, infinitely greater than any temple we build for him, and the human person, our neighbour, who is worth more than all the news reports of the world. So, to help us realize what really counts in life, Jesus warns us about two temptations.

The first is the temptation of haste, of the *right now*. For Jesus, we must not follow those who tell us that the end is coming immediately, that “the time is at hand” (v. 8). That is, we must not follow the alarmists who fuel fear of others and of the future, for fear paralyzes the heart and mind. Yet how often do we let ourselves be seduced by a frantic desire to know *everything right now*, by the itch of curiosity, by the latest sensational or scandalous news, by lurid stories, by the screaming those who shout loudest and angriest, by those who tell us it is “now or never”. This haste, this *everything right now*, does not come from God. If we get worked up about the *right now*, we forget what remains *forever*: we follow the passing clouds and lose sight of the sky. Drawn by the latest outcry, we no longer find time for God or for our brother and sister living next door. How true this is today! In the frenzy of running, of achieving everything right now, anyone left behind is viewed as a nuisance. And considered disposable. How many elderly, unborn, disabled and poor persons are considered useless. We go our way in haste, without worrying that gaps are increasing, that the greed of a few is adding to the poverty of many others.

As an antidote to haste, Jesus today proposes to each of us *perseverance*. “By your endurance you will gain your lives” (v. 19). Perseverance entails moving forward each day with our eyes fixed on what does not pass away: the Lord and our neighbour. This is why perseverance is the gift of God that preserves all his other gifts (cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Dono Perseverantiae*, 2.4). Let us ask that each of us, and all of us as Church, may persevere in the good and not lose sight of what really counts.

There is a second illusion that Jesus wants to spare us. He says: “Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ Do not go after them” (v. 8). It is the *temptation of self-centredness*. Christians, since we do not seek the *right now* but the *forever*, are not concerned with the *me* but with the *you*. Christians, that is, do not follow the siren song of their whims, but rather the call of love, the voice of Jesus. How is Jesus’ voice discerned? “Many will come in my name”, the Lord says, but they are not to be followed: wearing the label “Christian” or “Catholic” is not enough to belong to Jesus. We need to speak the same language as Jesus: that of love, *the language of the you*. Those who speak the language of Jesus are not the ones who say *I*, but rather the ones who step out of themselves. And yet how often, even when we do good, does the *hypocrisy of the self* take over? I do good so that I can be considered good; I give in order to receive in turn; I offer help so that I can win the friendship of some important person. That is how the *language of the self* speaks. The word of God, however, spurs us to a “genuine love” (*Rom* 12:9), to give to those who cannot repay us (cf. *Lk* 14:14), to serve others without seeking anything in return (cf. *Lk* 6:35). So let us ask ourselves: “Do I help someone who has nothing to give me in return? Do I, a Christian, have at least one poor person as a friend”?

The poor are valuable in the eyes of God because they do not speak the language of the self: they do not support themselves on their own, by their own strength; they need someone to take them by the hand. The poor remind us how we should live the Gospel: like beggars reaching out to God. The presence of the poor makes us breathe the fresh air of the Gospel, where the poor in spirit are

blessed (cf. *Mt* 5:3). Instead of feeling annoyed when they knock on our doors, let us welcome their cry for help as a summons to go out of ourselves, to welcome them with God's own loving gaze. How beautiful it would be if the poor could occupy in our hearts the place they have in the heart of God! Standing with the poor, serving the poor, we see things as Jesus does; we see what remains and what passes away.

Let us return to our initial questions. Amid so many penultimate and passing realities, the Lord wants to remind us today of what is ultimate, what will remain forever. It is love, for "God is love" (*1 Jn* 4:8). The poor person who begs for my love leads me straight to God. The poor facilitate our access to heaven: this is why the sense of the faith of God's People has viewed them as the *gatekeepers of heaven*. Even now, they are our treasure, the treasure of the Church. For the poor reveal to us the riches that never grow old, that unite heaven and earth, the riches for which life is truly worth living: the riches of love.