



The Holy See

HOLY MASS WITH THE MYANMAR COMMUNITY IN ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS *St Peter's Basilica - Altar of the Cathedra*

Solemnity of the Ascension - Seventh Sunday of Easter, 16 May 2021 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

In the last hours of his life, Jesus prays. In those sorrowful moments, as he prepares to take leave of his disciples and this world, Jesus prays for his friends. Even though he bears in his heart and in his flesh all the sin of the world, Jesus continues to love us and pray for us. From his prayer, we learn how to deal with dramatic and painful moments in our own lives. Let us think about one particular word that Jesus uses in his prayer to Father: it is the word “*keep*”. Dear brothers and sisters, in these days when your beloved country of Myanmar is experiencing violence, conflict and repression, let us ask ourselves: what we are being called to keep?

In the first place, *to keep the faith*. We need to keep the faith lest we yield to grief or plunge into the despair of those who no longer see a way out. In the Gospel, John tells us that Jesus, before uttering a word, “looked up to heaven” (*Jn 17:1*). In these, the final hours of his life, Jesus is weighed down by anguish at the prospect of his passion, conscious of the dark night he is about to endure, feeling betrayed and abandoned. Yet in the same moment, he looks up to heaven. Jesus lifts his eyes to God. He does not resign himself to evil; he does not let himself be overwhelmed by grief; he does not retreat into the bitterness of the defeated and disappointed; instead, he looks to heaven. This was the same advice he had given his disciples: when Jerusalem is invaded by armies, and people are fleeing in dismay amid fear and devastation, he tells them to “stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (*Lk 21:28*). To keep the faith is to keep our gaze lifted up to heaven, as here on earth, battles are fought and innocent blood is shed. To keep the faith is to refuse to yield to the logic of hatred and vengeance, but to keep our gaze fixed on the God of love, who calls us to be brothers and sisters to one another.

Prayer leads us to trust in God even in times of difficulty. It helps us to hope when things seem hopeless and it sustains us in our everyday struggles. Prayer is not a retreat, an escape, in the face of problems. Instead, it is the only weapon at our disposal for keeping love and hope alive amid the weapons of death. It is not easy to lift our gaze when we are hurting, but faith helps us

resist the temptation to turn in on ourselves. We may want to protest, to cry out to God in our pain. We should not be afraid to do so, for this too is prayer. An elderly woman once said to her grandchildren: "being angry with God can also be a form of prayer"; the wisdom of the just and the simple, who know when to lift up their eyes in difficult moments... At times it is a prayer that God hears more than others, since it comes from a wounded heart and the Lord always hears the cry of his people and dries their tears. Dear brothers and sisters, keep looking up to heaven. Keep the faith!

Second, *to keep unity*. Jesus asks the Father to preserve the unity of his disciples, so that they may be "completely one" (Jn 17:21), one family in which love and fraternity reign. He knew what was in the heart of his disciples; he had seen them argue at times about who was the greatest, who should be in charge. This is a deadly disease: the disease of division. We experience it in our hearts, because we are divided within; we experience it in families and communities, among peoples, even in the Church. Sins against unity abound: envy, jealousy, the pursuit of personal interests rather than the common good, the tendency to judge others. Those little conflicts of ours find a reflection in great conflicts, like the one your country is experiencing in these days. Once partisan interests and the thirst for profit and power take over, conflicts and divisions inevitably break out. The final appeal that Jesus makes before his Passover is an appeal for unity. For division is of the devil, the great divider and the great liar who always creates division.

We are called to keep unity, to take seriously this heartfelt plea of Jesus to the Father: to be completely one, to be a family, to find the courage to live in friendship, love and fraternity. What great need we have, especially today, for fraternity! I know that some political and social situations are bigger than we are. Yet commitment to peace and fraternity always comes from below: each person, in little things, can play his or her part. Each of you can make an effort to be, in little things, a builder of fraternity, a sower of fraternity, someone who works to rebuild what is broken rather than fomenting violence. We are also called to do this as a Church; let us promote dialogue, respect for others, care for our brothers and sisters, communion! We cannot allow a partisan way of thinking to enter into the Church, a way of thinking that divides, that puts each individual in first place while casting others aside. This is very destructive: it destroys the family, the Church, the society and everyone of us.

Finally, and third, we are called *to keep the truth*. Jesus asks the Father to consecrate his disciples in truth as they will be sent throughout the world to carry on his mission. Keeping the truth does not mean defending ideas, becoming guardians of a system of doctrines and dogmas, but remaining bound to Christ and being devoted to his Gospel. Truth, for the apostle John, is Christ himself, the revelation of the Father's love. Jesus prays that his disciples, although living in the world, will not follow the criteria of this world. They are not to let themselves be enticed by idols, but to keep their friendship with him; they are not to bend the Gospel to human and worldly ways of thinking, but to preserve his message in its integrity. To keep the truth means to be a prophet in every situation in life, in other words to be consecrated to the Gospel and bear witness to it even

when that means going against the current. At times, we Christians want to compromise, but the Gospel asks us to be steadfast in the truth and for the truth, offering our lives for others. Amid war, violence and hatred, fidelity to the Gospel and being peacemakers calls for commitment, also through social and political choices, even at the risk of our lives. Only in this way can things change. The Lord has no use for the lukewarm. He wants us to be consecrated in the truth and the beauty of the Gospel, so that we can testify to the joy of God's kingdom even in the dark night of grief, even when evil seems to have the upper hand.

Dear brothers and sisters, today I wish to lay upon the Lord's altar the sufferings of his people and to join you in praying that God will convert all hearts to peace. Jesus' prayer helps us keep the faith, even in times of difficulty, to be builders of unity and to risk our lives for the truth of the Gospel. Please, do not lose hope: even today, Jesus is interceding before the Father, he stands before the Father in his prayer. He shows the Father, in his prayer, the wounds with which he paid for our salvation. In this prayer Jesus intercedes for all of us, praying that the Father will keep us from the evil one and set us free from evil's power.