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Holy Saturday: the Lord frees us from being Christians without hope

Vatican City, 26 March 2016 – Let us not give in to sadness and darkness, but instead open ourselves to the light of hope and let the light of the Resurrected enter into our hearts, was the exhortation the Pope addressed to all the faithful during the Vigil of the Holy Night of Easter, celebrated in the Vatican basilica, during which, following the blessing of the fire and the paschal candle, and the singing of the Exsultet hymn, baptism was administered to twelve neophytes from Italy, Albania, Cameroon, Korea, India and China.

In his homily the Pope reflected on the thoughts that may have crossed Peter's mind and stirred his heart as he ran to the tomb, as narrated in the Gospel, which tells us that the disciples had not believed the testimony of the women, considering it 'an idle tale'. "There was doubt in Peter's heart, together with many other worries", said the Pope: "sadness at the death of the beloved Master and disillusionment for having denied him three times during His Passion".

There is, however, something which signals a change in him: after listening to the women and refusing to believe them, "Peter rose". "He did not remain seated in thought; he did not stay at home as the others did", Francis observed. "He did not succumb to the sombre atmosphere of those days, nor was he overwhelmed by his doubts. He was not consumed by remorse, fear or the continuous gossip that leads nowhere. He was looking for Jesus, not himself. He preferred the path of encounter and trust. And so, he got up, just as he was, and ran towards the tomb from where he would return 'amazed'. This marked the beginning of Peter's resurrection, the resurrection of his heart. Without giving in to sadness or darkness, he made room for hope: he allowed the light of God to enter into his heart, without smothering it".

The women too, who had gone out early in the morning to perform a work of mercy, taking the perfumed ointments to the tomb, had the same experience. They were "frightened and bowed their faces", and yet they were deeply affected by the words of the angel: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?".

"We, like Peter and the women, cannot discover life by being sad, bereft of hope", emphasised the Holy Father. "Let us not stay imprisoned within ourselves, but instead break open our sealed tombs to the Lord – each of us knows what they are – so that He may enter and grant us life. Let us give Him the stones of our rancour and the boulders of our past, those heavy burdens of our weaknesses and falls. Christ wants to come and take us by the

hand to bring us out of our anguish. This is the first stone to be moved aside this night: the lack of hope which imprisons us within ourselves. May the Lord free us from this trap, from being Christians without hope, who live as if the Lord were not risen, as if our problems were the centre of our lives".

"We see and will continue to see problems both within and without. They will always be there. But tonight it is important to shed the light of the Risen Lord upon our problems, and in a certain sense, to "evangelise" them. To evangelise our problems. Let us not allow darkness and fear to distract us and control us; we must cry out to them: the Lord 'is not here, but has risen!'. He is our greatest joy; He is always at our side and will never let us down".

"This is the foundation of our hope, which is not mere optimism, nor a psychological attitude or desire to be courageous. Christian hope is a gift that God gives us if we come out of ourselves and open our hearts to Him. This hope does not disappoint us because the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts. The Paraclete does not make everything look appealing. He does not remove evil with a magic wand. But He pours into us the vitality of life, which is not the absence of problems, but the certainty of being loved and always forgiven by Christ, Who for us has conquered sin, conquered death and conquered fear. Today is the celebration of our hope, the celebration of this truth: nothing and no one will ever be able to separate us from his love".

"The Lord is alive and wants to be sought among the living. After having found Him, each person is sent out by Him to announce the Easter message, to awaken and resurrect hope in hearts burdened by sadness, in those who struggle to find meaning in life. There is so necessary today. However, we must not proclaim ourselves. Rather, as joyful servants of hope, we must announce the Risen One by our lives and by our love; otherwise we will be only an international organisation full of followers and good rules, yet incapable of offering the hope for which the world longs".

"How can we strengthen our hope? The liturgy of this night offers some guidance. It teaches us to remember the works of God. The readings describe God's faithfulness, the history of his love towards us. The living word of God is able to involve us in this history of love, nourishing our hope and renewing our joy. The Gospel also reminds us of this: in order to kindle hope in the hearts of the women, the angel tells them: 'Remember what [Jesus] told you'. Remember the words of Jesus, remember all that He has done in our lives. Let us not forget His words and His works, otherwise we will lose hope and become 'hopeless' Christians. Let us instead remember the Lord, His goodness and His life-giving words which have touched us. Let us remember them and make them ours, to be sentinels of the morning who know how to help others see the signs of the Risen Lord".

"Dear brothers and sisters, Christ is risen! And we have the possibility of opening our hearts and receiving his gift of hope. Let us open our hearts to hope and go forth. May the memory of His works and His words be the bright star which directs our steps in the ways of faith towards that Easter that will have no end".
