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Celebration of Palm Sunday and the Passion of the Lord

At 10.00 this morning the Holy Father Francis presided at the solemn liturgical celebration of Palm Sunday and the Passion of the Lord in Saint Peter's Square.

In the centre of the square, near the obelisk, the Pope blessed the palms and olive branches, and at the end of the procession to the parvis, celebrated Holy Mass of the Passion of the Lord.

The celebration was attended by young people from Rome and other dioceses on the occasion of the 33rd World Youth Day, held at diocesan level, on the theme: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God*" (Lk 1: 30).

At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, before the Apostolic Blessing, the Holy Father was given the conclusions of the pre-Synodal Meeting in preparation for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in October 2018, on the theme: "Young people, the faith and vocational discernment".

The following is the homily pronounced by Pope Francis before the proclamation of the Passion of the Lord according to Mark:

Homily of the Holy Father

Jesus enters Jerusalem. The liturgy invites us to share in the joy and celebration of the people who cry out in praise of their Lord; a joy that will fade and leaves a bitter and sorrowful taste by the end of the account of the Passion. This celebration seems to combine stories of joy and suffering, mistakes and successes, which are part of our daily lives as disciples. It somehow expresses the contradictory feelings that we too, the men and women of today, experience: the capacity for great love... but also for great hatred; the capacity for courageous self-sacrifice, but also the ability to "wash our hands" at the right moment; the capacity for loyalty, but also for great abandonment and betrayal.

We also see clearly throughout the Gospel account that the joy Jesus awakens is, for some, a source of anger and irritation.

Jesus enters the city surrounded by His people and by a cacophony of singing and shouting. We can imagine that amid the outcry we hear, all at the same time, the voice of the forgiven son, the healed leper, or the bleating of the lost sheep. Then too, the song of the publican and the unclean man; the cry of those living on the edges of the city. And the cry of those men and women who had followed Jesus because they felt His compassion for their pain and misery... That outcry is the song and the spontaneous joy of all those left behind and overlooked, who, having been touched by Jesus, can now shout: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord". How could they not praise the One Who had restored their dignity and hope? Theirs is the joy of so many forgiven sinners who are able to trust and hope once again. And they cry out. They rejoice. This is joy.

All this joy and praise is a source of unease, scandal and upset for those who consider themselves righteous and "faithful" to the law and its ritual precepts.[1] A joy unbearable for those hardened against pain, suffering and misery. Many of these think to themselves: "Such ill-mannered people!" A joy intolerable for those who have forgotten the many chances they themselves had been given. How hard it is for the comfortable and the self-righteous to understand the joy and the celebration of God's mercy! How hard it is for those who trust only in themselves, and look down on others, to share in this joy.[2]

And so here is where another kind of shouting comes from, the fierce cry of those who shout out: "Crucify him!" It is not spontaneous but already armed with disparagement, slander and false witness. It is a cry that emerges in moving from the facts to an account of the facts; it comes from this "story". It is the voice of those who twist reality and invent stories for their own benefit, without concern for the good name of others. This is a false account. The cry of those who have no problem in seeking ways to gain power and to silence dissonant voices. The cry that comes from "spinning" facts and painting them such that they disfigure the face of Jesus and turn Him into a "criminal". It is the voice of those who want to defend their own position, especially by discrediting the defenceless. It is the cry born of the show of self-sufficiency, pride and arrogance, which sees no problem in shouting: "Crucify him, crucify him".

And so the celebration of the people ends up being stifled. Hope is demolished, dreams are killed, joy is suppressed; the heart is shielded and charity grows cold. It is cry of "save yourself", which would dull our sense of solidarity, dampen our ideals, and blur our vision... the cry that wants to erase compassion, that "suffering with" that is compassion, that is the weakness of God.

Faced with such people, the best remedy is to look at Christ's cross and let ourselves be challenged by His final cry. He died crying out His love for each of us: young and old, saints and sinners, the people of His times and of our own. We have been saved by His cross, and no one can repress the joy of the Gospel; no one, in any situation whatsoever, is far from the Father's merciful gaze. Looking at the cross means allowing our priorities, choices and actions to be challenged. It means questioning ourselves about our sensitivity to those experiencing difficulty. Brothers and sisters, where is our heart focused? Does Jesus Christ continue to be a source of joy and praise in our heart, or does its priorities and concerns make us ashamed to look at sinners, the least and forgotten?

And you, dear young people, the joy that Jesus awakens in you is a source of anger and even irritation to some, since a joyful young person is hard to manipulate. A joyful young person is hard to manipulate!

But today, a third kind of shouting is possible: "And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He replied, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out"" (Lk 19: 39-40).

The temptation to silence young people has always existed. The Pharisees themselves rebuke Jesus and ask Him to silence them.

There are many ways to silence young people and make them invisible. Many ways to anaesthetize them, to make them keep quiet, ask nothing, question nothing. "Keep quiet, you!" There are many ways to sedate them,

to keep them from getting involved, to make their dreams flat and dreary, petty and plaintive.

On this Palm Sunday, as we celebrate World Youth Day, we do well to hear Jesus' answer to all those Pharisees past and present, even the ones of today: "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Lk 19:40).

Dear young people, you have it in you to shout. It is up to you to opt for Sunday's "Hosanna!", so as not to fall into Friday's "Crucify him!"... It is up to you not to keep quiet. Even if others keep quiet, if we older people and leaders – so often corrupt – keep quiet, if the whole world keeps quiet and loses its joy, I ask you: Will you cry out?

Please, make that choice, before the stones themselves cry out.

[1] Cf. R. Guardini, *El Señor*, 383.

[2] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 94.
