



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAEHOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Look at the crucifix in the light of redemption"

Tuesday, 31 March 2020

[[Multimedia](#)]

Introduction

We pray today for those who are homeless, at this moment in which everyone is supposed to be at home. May society, men and women, be aware of this situation and help them, and may the Church welcome them.

Homily

A serpent is certainly not a friendly animal: it is always associated with evil. Even in revelation, the serpent is specifically the animal that the devil uses in order to cause sin. In the Book of Revelation the devil is called the 'ancient serpent', the one who from the beginning bites, poisons, destroys, kills. This is why it cannot succeed. If you want to succeed as one who proposes beautiful things, these are fantasies: we believe in them and so we sin. This is what happened to the people of Israel: they could no longer put up with the journey. They were tired. And the people spoke against God and Moses. It is always the same music. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? Here there is no bread and no water, and we loathe this worthless food, this manna." (see *Nm* 21:4-5). And their imagination - as we have read in the past days - always returned to Egypt: "We were doing well there. We ate well". It also seems that the Lord could not bear His people at that moment. He got angry. The wrath of God is seen at times. And so, "the Lord sent among the people saraph serpents, which bit the people so that many Israelites died" (*Nm* 21:5). At that time the serpent was always the image of evil. In seeing the serpents, the

people saw their sin, what they had done wrong. They went to Moses and said: “We have sinned in complaining against the Lord and you. Pray the Lord to take the serpents from us” (*Nm 21:7*). They repent. This is the story in the desert. Moses prayed for the people and the Lord said to Moses: “Build a serpent and set it on a pole. Every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (*Nm 21:8*).

I wonder is this not idolatry? The serpent is there, an idol which gives me health... It cannot be understood. It cannot be understood logically, because it is a prophecy, it is a proclamation of what will happen. Because we have also heard a similar prophecy in the Gospel: “When you have lifted up the Son of a man, then you will know that I Am and that I do nothing on my own” (*Jn 8:28*) Jesus lifted up: on the cross. Moses made a serpent and set it on a pole. Jesus will be lifted up like the serpent to bring salvation. But the core of the prophecy is that Jesus made Himself into sin for us. He did not sin; He made Himself sin. As St. Peter says in his letter, “He bore all of our sins in Himself” (cf. *1Pt 2:24*) And so, when we gaze on the crucifix, we think about the Lord who suffers, and all of that is true. But let us pause a moment in order to arrive at the centre of that truth: at this moment You seem to be the greatest sinner. You made Yourself sin. He took upon Himself all of our sins, He annihilated Himself. The cross, it is true, is a torture: there was a vendetta by the doctors of the law who did not want Him. All of that is true. But the truth that comes from God is that He came into the world to take our own sins upon Himself to the point of making Himself into sin. All sin. Our sins are there.”

We need to make it a habit of looking at the crucifix in this light, which is the truest, it is the light of redemption. In Jesus made sin we see the utter defeat of Christ. He did not pretend to die, He did not pretend to suffer, alone, abandoned... “Father, why have you forsaken me?” (see *Mt 27:46*; *Mk 15:34*). A serpent: I am lifted up like a serpent, like that which is all sin.

It is not easy to understand this and if we think about it, we will never arrive at a conclusion. We can only contemplate, pray, and give thanks.

Spiritual Communion

Those who cannot receive communion may now make a spiritual communion.

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there, and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.