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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Egypt (28-29 April 2017) – Holy Mass at the “Air Defense Stadium” in Cairo

This morning, after leaving the Apostolic Nunciature where he greeted, among others, a group of children from the Combonian School of Cairo, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the “Air Defense Stadium”.

Upon arrival he toured the stadium by popemobile, among the faithful. Then, at 10.00 he presided at the Eucharistic celebration.

At the end of the Holy Mass, the Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, His Beatitude Ibrahim Isaac Sedrak, greeted the Holy Father Francis on behalf of all Catholic denominations in Egypt. After the final blessing, the Pope returned by car to the Apostolic Nunciature where he lunched with the Egyptian bishops and members of the papal entourage.

The following is the full text of the homily pronounced by the Holy Father after the proclamation of the Holy Gospel:

Homily of the Holy Father

As-salamu alaykum! Peace be with you!

Today’s Gospel of the third Sunday of Easter speaks to us of the journey to Emmaus of the two disciples who set out from Jerusalem. It can be summed up in three words: *death, resurrection* and *life*.

Death. The two disciples are returning, full of despair and disappointment, to life as usual. The Master is dead and thus it is pointless to hope. They feel disappointment and despair. Theirs is a journey of return, as they leave behind the painful experience of Jesus’ crucifixion. The crisis of the cross, indeed the “scandal” and “foolishness” of the cross (cf. *1 Cor* 1:18, 2:2), seems to have buried any hope they had. The one on whom they

had built their lives is dead; in His defeat, He brought all their aspirations with Him to the tomb.

They could not believe that their Master and Saviour, Who had raised others from the dead and healed the sick, would end up hanging on the cross of shame. They could not understand why Almighty God had not saved Him from such a disgraceful death. The cross of Christ was the cross of their own ideas about God; the death of Christ was the death of what they thought God to be. But in fact, it was they who were dead, buried in the tomb of their limited understanding.

How often do we paralyze ourselves by refusing to transcend our own ideas of God, a god created in the image and likeness of man! How often do we despair by refusing to believe that God's omnipotence is not one of power and authority, but rather of love, forgiveness and life!

The disciples recognized Jesus in the "breaking of the bread", in the Eucharist. Unless we tear apart the veil clouding our vision and shatter the hardness of our hearts and our prejudices, we will never be able to recognize the face of God.

Resurrection. In the gloom of their darkest night, at the moment of their greatest despair, Jesus approaches the two disciples and walks at their side, to make them see that He is "the Way, and the Truth and the Life" (*Jn* 14:6). Jesus turns their despair into life, for when human hope vanishes, divine hope begins to shine in its place. "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (*Lk* 18:27; cf. 1:37). When we reach the depths of failure and helplessness, when we rid ourselves of the illusion that we are the best, sufficient unto ourselves and the centre of our world, then God reaches out to us to turn our night into dawn, our affliction into joy, our death into resurrection. He turns our steps back to Jerusalem, back to life and to the victory of the Cross (cf. *Heb* 11:34).

After meeting the Risen Lord, the two disciples returned filled with joy, confidence and enthusiasm, ready to bear witness. The Risen One made them rise from the tomb of their unbelief and their sorrow. Encountering the Lord, crucified and risen, they discovered the meaning and fulfillment of the whole of Scripture, the Law and the Prophets. They discovered the meaning of the apparent defeat of the cross.

Those who do not pass from the experience of the cross to the truth of the resurrection condemn themselves to despair! For we cannot encounter God without first crucifying our narrow notions of a god who reflects only our own understanding of omnipotence and power.

Life. The encounter with the Risen Jesus transformed the lives of those two disciples because meeting the Risen One transforms every life, and makes fruitful what is barren (cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 11 April 2007). Faith in the resurrection is not a product of the Church, but the Church herself is born of faith in the resurrection. As Saint Paul says: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (*1 Cor* 15:14).

The Risen Lord vanished from the sight of the disciples in order to teach us that we cannot hold on to Jesus as He appeared in history: "Blessed are those who believe and yet have not seen" (*Jn* 21:29; cf. 20:17). The Church needs to know and believe that Jesus lives within her and gives her life in the Eucharist, the scriptures and the sacraments. The disciples on the way to Emmaus realized this, and returned to Jerusalem in order to share their experience with the others: "We have seen the Risen One... Yes, He is truly risen!" (cf. *Lk* 24:32).

The experience of the disciples on the way to Emmaus teaches us that it is of no use to fill our places of worship if our hearts are empty of the fear of God and of His presence. It is of no use to pray if our prayer to God does not turn into love for our brothers and sisters. All our religiosity means nothing unless it is inspired by deep faith and charity. It is of no use to be concerned about our image, since God looks at the soul and the heart (cf. *1 Sam* 16:7) and He detests hypocrisy (cf. *Lk* 11:37-54; *Acts* 5:3, 4)[1]. For God, it is better not to believe than to be a false believer, a hypocrite!

True faith is one that makes us more charitable, more merciful, more honest and more humane. It moves our

hearts to love everyone without counting the cost, without distinction and without preference. It makes us see the other not as an enemy to be overcome, but a brother or sister to be loved, served and helped. It spurs us on to spread, defend and live out the culture of encounter, dialogue, respect and fraternity. It gives us the courage to forgive those who have wronged us, to extend a hand to the fallen, to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to visit the imprisoned, to help orphans, to give drink to those who thirst, and to come to the aid of the elderly and those in need (cf. *Mt 25*). True faith leads us to protect the rights of others with the same zeal and enthusiasm with which we defend our own. Indeed, the more we grow in faith and knowledge, the more we grow in humility and in the awareness of our littleness.

Dear brothers and sisters,

God is pleased only by a faith that is proclaimed by our lives, for the only fanaticism believers can have is that of charity! Any other fanaticism does not come from God and is not pleasing to Him!

So now, like the disciples of Emmaus, filled with joy, courage and faith, return to your own Jerusalem, that is, to your daily lives, your families, your work and your beloved country. Do not be afraid to open your hearts to the light of the Risen Lord, and let Him transform your uncertainty into a positive force for yourselves and for others. Do not be afraid to love everyone, friends and enemies alike, because the strength and treasure of the believer lies in a life of love!

May Our Lady and the Holy Family, who dwelt in this venerable land of yours, enlighten our hearts and bless you and this beloved country of Egypt, which at the dawn of Christianity welcomed the preaching of Saint Mark, and throughout its history has brought forth so many martyrs and a great multitude of holy men and women.

Al Masih qam! Bi-l-haqiqa qam!

Christ is risen! He is truly risen!

[1] Saint Ephraim exclaims: "Just tear off the mask that covers the hypocrite and you will see only corruption" (Sermon). "Woe to them that are of a double heart", says Ecclesiasticus (2:14, Vulg).