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Celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

At 10.30 this morning, the Holy Father Francis presided, at the Altar of the Cathedra in Saint Peter's Basilica, at the solemn liturgical celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord.

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

Homily of the Holy Father

Every year this liturgy leaves us amazed: we pass from the joy of welcoming Jesus as he enters Jerusalem to the sorrow of watching him condemned to death and then crucified. That sense of interior amazement will remain with us throughout Holy Week. Let us reflect more deeply on it.

From the start, Jesus leaves us amazed. His people give him a solemn welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to bring the Passover to fulfilment by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. What happened to those people who in a few days' time went from shouting "Hosanna" to crying out "Crucify him"? What happened? They were following an *idea* of the Messiah rather than *the* Messiah. They *admired* Jesus, but they did not let themselves be *amazed* by him. Amazement is not the same as admiration. Admiration can be worldly, since it follows its own tastes and expectations. Amazement, on the other hand, remains open to others and to the newness they bring. Even today, there are many people who admire Jesus: he said beautiful things; he was filled with love and forgiveness; his example changed history, ... and so on. They admire him, but their lives are not changed. To admire Jesus is not enough. We have to follow in his footsteps, to let ourselves be challenged by him; to pass from admiration to amazement.

What is most amazing about the Lord and his Passover? It is the fact that he achieves glory through humiliation. He triumphs by accepting suffering and death, things that we, in our quest for admiration and success, would rather avoid. Jesus – as Saint Paul tells us – “emptied himself... he humbled himself” (*Phil 2:7.8*). This is the

amazing thing: to see the Almighty reduced to nothing. To see the Word who knows all things teach us in silence from the height of the cross. To see the king of kings enthroned on a gibbet. Seeing the God of the universe stripped of everything and crowned with thorns instead of glory. To see the One who is goodness personified, insulted and beaten. Why all this humiliation? Why, Lord, did you wish to endure all this?

Jesus did it for us, to plumb the depths of our human experience, our entire existence, all our evil. To draw near to us and not abandon us in our suffering and our death. To redeem us, to save us. Jesus was lifted high on the cross in order to descend to the abyss of our suffering. He experienced our deepest sorrows: failure, loss of everything, betrayal by a friend, even abandonment by God. By experiencing in the flesh our deepest struggles and conflicts, he redeemed and transformed them. His love draws close to our frailty; it touches the very things of which we are most ashamed. Yet now we know that we are not alone: God is at our side in every affliction, in every fear; no evil, no sin will ever have the final word. God triumphs, but the palm of victory passes through the wood of the cross. For the palm and the cross are inseparable.

Let us ask for the grace to be amazed. A Christian life without amazement becomes drab and dreary. How can we talk about the joy of meeting Jesus, unless we are daily astonished and amazed by his love, which brings us forgiveness and the possibility of a new beginning? When faith no longer experiences amazement, it grows dull: it becomes blind to the wonders of grace; it can no longer taste the Bread of life and hear the Word; it can no longer perceive the beauty of our brothers and sisters and the gift of creation. It has no other course than to take refuge in legalisms, in clericalisms and in all these things that Jesus condemns in chapter 23 of the Gospel of Matthew.

During this Holy Week, let us lift our eyes to the cross, in order to receive the grace of amazement. As Saint Francis of Assisi contemplated the crucified Lord, he was amazed that his friars did not weep. What about us? Can we still be moved by God's love? Have we lost the ability to be amazed by him? Why? Maybe our faith has grown dull from habit. Maybe we remain trapped in our regrets and allow ourselves to be crippled by our disappointments. Maybe we have lost all our trust or even feel worthless. But perhaps, behind all these "maybes", lies the fact that we are not open to the gift of the Spirit who gives us the grace of amazement.

Let us start over from amazement. Let us gaze upon Jesus on the cross and say to him: "Lord, how much you love me! How precious I am to you!" Let us be amazed by Jesus so that we can start living again, for the grandeur of life lies not in possessions and promotions, but in realizing that we are loved. This is the grandeur of life: discovering that we are loved. And the grandeur of life lies precisely in the beauty of love. In the crucified Jesus, we see God humiliated, the Almighty dismissed and discarded. And with the grace of amazement we come to realize that in welcoming the dismissed and discarded, in drawing close to those ill-treated by life, we are loving Jesus. For that is where he is: in the least of our brothers and sisters, in the rejected and discarded, in those whom our self-righteous culture condemns.

Today's Gospel shows us, immediately after the death of Jesus, a splendid icon of amazement. It is the scene of the centurion who, upon seeing that Jesus had died, said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39). He was amazed by love. How did he see Jesus die? He saw him die in love, and this amazed him. Jesus suffered immensely, but he never stopped loving. This is what it is to be amazed before God, who can fill even death with love. In that gratuitous and unprecedented love, the pagan centurion found God. His words – *Truly this man was the Son of God!* – "seal" the Passion narrative. The Gospels tell us that many others before him had admired Jesus for his miracles and prodigious works, and had acknowledged that he was the Son of God. Yet Christ silenced them, because they risked remaining purely on the level of worldly admiration at the idea of a God to be adored and feared for his power and might. Now it can no longer be so, for at the foot of the cross there can be no mistake: God has revealed himself and reigns only with the disarmed and disarming power of love.

Brothers and sisters, today God continues to fill our minds and hearts with amazement. Let us be filled with that amazement as we gaze upon the crucified Lord. May we too say: "You are truly the Son of God. You are my God".
