



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Penitential Celebration presided over by the Holy Father Francis in the parish of San Pio V

This afternoon, in the parish of San Pio V, in Rome, the Holy Father Francis presided over a penitential liturgy for the Reconciliation of several penitents, with confession and individual absolution.

The celebration began the Lenten initiative, “24 Hours for the Lord”, organized by the Dicastery for Evangelization, which is celebrated every year in dioceses throughout the world on the eve of the fourth Sunday of Lent, “*Laetare* Sunday”.

This year’s edition forms part of the Year of Prayer and took place on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 March.

The following is the homily delivered by the Pope during the Penitential Celebration:

Homily of the Holy Father

“We too might walk in newness of life” (*Rm* 6:4): thus writes the apostle Paul to the first Christians of this Church of Rome. But what is the *newness of life* he talks about? It is the life that is born of Baptism, which immerses us in the death and resurrection of Jesus and makes us forever children of God, children of the resurrection destined for eternal life, oriented to the things above. It is the life that brings us forward into our truest identity, that of being beloved children of the Father, so that every sadness and obstacle, every toil and tribulation cannot prevail over this wondrous reality that founds us: we are children of the good God.

We have heard that Saint Paul associates the new life with a verb: *to walk*. Therefore, the new life, initiated in Baptism, is a journey. And there is no retirement in this! No one in this journey retires, one always goes forward. And after many steps in the journey, perhaps we have lost sight of the holy life that runs within us: day after day, immersed in a repetitive rhythm, caught up in a thousand things, overwhelmed by so many messages, we look everywhere for satisfactions and novelties, stimuli and positive sensations, but we forget that there is already a new life that runs within us and, like the embers beneath the ashes, it is waiting to kindle and shed light on everything. When we are occupied with so many things, do we think of the Holy Spirit that is within us and

carries us? It often happens to me not to think of it, and it is bad. Being like this, caught up in so many travails, makes us forget the true journey we are on in the new life.

We must look for the embers under the ashes, those ashes that settle on the heart and hide from view the beauty of our soul; they hide it. So, God, who in the new life is our Father, seems to us to be a master; instead of entrusting ourselves to Him, we negotiate with Him; instead of loving Him, we fear Him. And others, instead of being brothers and sisters, as children of the same Father, seem to be obstacles and adversaries. It is a bad habit: that of transforming our travelling companions into adversaries. And we do this many times. The faults of our neighbour seem exaggerated to us, and their qualities hidden; how often we are inflexible with others and indulgent towards ourselves! We feel an unstoppable force to do the evil we would like to avoid. This is a problem for everyone, if even Saint Paul writes, again to the community of Rome: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (*Rm 7:19*). He too was a sinner, and we too very often do the evil we do not want to do. In short, having clouded God's face, obscured that of our brothers and sisters, blurred the greatness we carry within, we keep on walking, but we need new signposts, we need a change of pace, a direction that helps us rediscover the path of Baptism, that is, to renew our original beauty, which is there under the ashes, to renew the sense of going forward. And how many times do we tire of walking and lose the sense of going forward? We stay quiet, or not even quiet, but still.

Brothers, sisters, what is the way to resume the path of the new life? For this Lent, and to resume the journey, what is the way? It is the *way of God's forgiveness*. Set this in your mind and heart: *God never tires of forgiving*. Have you heard? Are you able to repeat it with me? Together, everyone: [*all together*] God never tires of forgiving. Just to be sure, once again: [*all together*] God never tires of forgiving. But what is the problem? That *we tire of asking for forgiveness!* But He never tires of forgiving. Let us not forget this. And divine forgiveness does just this: it makes us new again, as if newly baptized. It cleanses us inside, returning us to the condition of our baptismal rebirth: it makes the fresh waters of grace flow again into our hearts, parched by sadness and dusted by sins. The Lord removes the ashes from the embers of the soul, cleanses those inner stains that prevent us from trusting in God, from embracing our brothers and sisters, from loving ourselves. He forgives *everything*. "Oh Father, I have a sin that is surely unforgivable". Listen: God forgives everything, because He never tires of forgiving. God's forgiveness transforms us inside: it gives us new life and new sight. It is no coincidence that in the Gospel we have heard Jesus proclaim: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (*Mt 5:8*). He prepares our eyes to see God. One only sees God if the heart is purified: purify the heart to see God. But who can do this purification? Our effort is necessary, but it is not enough: it is not enough, we are weak, we cannot do it; only God knows and heals the heart. Keep this clear in your mind: only God is capable of knowing and healing the heart, only He can free it from evil. For this to happen, we need to bring Him our heart, open and contrite; to imitate the leper of the Gospel, who asks Him: "If you will, you can make me clean" (*Mk 1:40*). This is beautiful! "If you will, you can change me inside, you can purify me". And now, in silence, everyone, say this to the Lord, looking at their own sins: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean". And He can. Some might think: "But this sin is too great, the Lord cannot...". The Lord forgives everything, the Lord does not tire of forgiving. Do you remember? Repeat it: "The Lord does not tire of forgiving". All together: [everyone] "The Lord does not tire of forgiving".

The Lord wants this, because He wants us renewed, free, light within, happy and on the move, not parked on the roads of life. He knows how easy it is for us to stumble, fall and stay on the ground, and He wants to lift us up. I saw a beautiful painting, in which there is the Lord who stoops to lift us up. And the Lord does this every time that we approach Confession. Let us not sadden Him, let us not postpone the encounter with His forgiveness, because only if we are lifted up by Him can we get back on our feet and see the defeat of our sin, erased forever. For sin is always a defeat, but He conquers sin, He is the victory. What is more, "at the very instant when the sinner is forgiven, grasped by God and restored by grace, sin - wonder of wonders! - becomes the place where God comes into contact with man. [...] Thus God makes himself known by forgiving" (A. Louf, *Under the Guidance of the Spirit*, Magnano 1990, 68-69). "I know God by studying catechesis...". But you do not know Him with your mind alone: only when your heart is repentant and you go to Him, showing your unclean heart, there you will know God who forgives. "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven". God makes Himself known by forgiving. And "the sinner, peering into the abyss of his own sin, discovers on his part the infinity of mercy" (*ibid.*) And this is the restart of the new life: begun in Baptism, it starts again from forgiveness.

Let us not renounce God's forgiveness, the Sacrament of Reconciliation: it is not a practise of devotion, but rather the foundation of Christian existence; it is not a question of knowing how to say our sins well, but of recognizing ourselves as sinners and throwing ourselves into the arms of the crucified Jesus to be set free; it is not a moralistic gesture, but the resurrection of the heart. The risen Lord resurrects us, all of us. So let us go to receive God's forgiveness and let us, who administer it, feel that we are dispensers of the joy of the Father who finds his lost son; let us feel that our hands, placed on the heads of the faithful, are those pierced with the mercy of Jesus, who transforms the wounds of sin into channels of mercy. And we, who act as confessors, may we feel that the "forgiveness and peace" we proclaim are the Holy Spirit's caress on the hearts of the faithful. Dear brothers, let us forgive! Dear brother priests, let us forgive, let us always forgive like God who does not tire of forgiveness, and we will find ourselves. Let us always grant forgiveness to those who ask for it and help those who feel fear to approach the *sacrament of healing and joy* with confidence. Let us put God's forgiveness back at the centre of the Church! And you, dear brother priests, do not ask too much: let them say, and you forgive all. Do not go and inquire, no.

And now, let us prepare ourselves for the new life, let us confess to the Lord that there is much that is old in us, bad things... The leprosy of sin has stained our beauty, and so let us say: "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean!*" All together: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". From thinking we do not need you every day: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". From living peacefully with my duplicity, without seeking in your forgiveness the way of freedom: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". When good intentions are not followed by deeds, when I postpone prayer and the encounter with you: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". When I come to terms with evil, with dishonesty, with falsehood, when I judge others, despise them and gossip about them, complaining about everyone and everything: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". And when I am content to do no evil, but do no good by serving in the Church and society: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*". Yes, Jesus, I believe that you can make me clean, that I need your forgiveness. Jesus, renew my and I will walk again in a new life: [everyone] "*Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean*".
