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Francis: ' Jesus lived the daily realities of most ordinary people:'

Thomas C. Fox | Mar. 27, 2013 NCR Today

As Catholics around the world attempt daily to discern how their new pope, Francis, sees the work of the church, evidence mounts through his actions and words. In his first general audience held today in St. Peter?s Square he spoke to a large crowd, which filled most of the square. He spoke of the need to reach out to all; he spoke of the need to reach out to the marginalized; he once again stressed the mercy of God.

Vatican radio printed a translation of Pope Francis? catechesis for his first General Audience, which included these passages:

But what does it mean for us to live Holy Week? What does it means to follow Jesus on His way to the Cross on Calvary and the Resurrection? In His earthly mission, Jesus walked the streets of the Holy Land; He called twelve simple people to remain with Him, to share His journey and continue His mission; He chose them among the people full of faith in the promises of God. He spoke to everyone, without distinction, to the great and the lowly; to the rich young man and the poor widow, the powerful and the weak; He brought the mercy and forgiveness of God to all; He healed, comforted, understood, gave hope, He led all to the presence of God, who is interested in every man and woman, like a good father and a good mother is interested in each child. God did not wait for us to go to Him, but He moved towards us, without calculation, without measures.

This is how God is: He is always the first, He moves towards us. Jesus lived the daily realities of most ordinary people: He was moved by the crowd that seemed like a flock without a shepherd, and He cried in front of the suffering of Martha and Mary on the death of their brother Lazarus; He called a tax collector to be His disciple and also suffered the betrayal of a friend. In Christ, God has given us the assurance that He is with us, in our midst. "Foxes", Jesus said, "have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head" (Mt 8:20). Jesus did not have a home because His house is the people -- that is, us; His mission is to open all God?s doors, to be the loving presence of God.

In Holy Week we live the highest point of this journey, this loving plan that runs throughout the entire history of the relationship between God and humanity. Jesus enters Jerusalem to take the final step, in which His whole live is summarized: He gives Himself totally. He keeps nothing for Himself, not even His life. At the Last Supper, with His friends, He shares the bread and distributes the chalice "for us." The Son of God is offered to us, He consigns His Body and his Blood into our hands to be with us always, to dwell among us. And on the Mount of Olives, as in the trial before Pilate, He puts up no resistance, He gifts Himself: He is the Suffering Servant foretold by Isaiah, who stripped himself unto death (cf. Is 53:12).

Jesus does not live this love that leads to sacrifice passively or as a fatal destiny; certainly He does not hide His deep human commotion in the face of a violent death, but He entrusts Himself with full confidence to the Father. Jesus voluntarily consigned Himself to death to respond to the love of God the Father, in perfect union with His will, to demonstrate His love for us. On the Cross, Jesus "loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Each of us can say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." Everyone can say that "for me".

Living Holy Week following Jesus means learning how to come out of ourselves - as I said on Sunday - to reach

out to others, to go to the outskirts of existence, to be the first to move towards our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most distant, those who are forgotten, those who are most in need of understanding, consolation and help. There is so much need to bring the living presence of Jesus, merciful and full of love!

Living Holy Week means increasingly entering into God's logic, the logic of the Cross, which is not first of all that of pain and death, but of love and of self-giving that brings life. It means entering into the logic of the Gospel. Following, accompanying Christ, remaining with Him requires an "stepping outside" stepping outside. Stepping outside of ourselves, of a tired and routine way of living the faith, of the temptation to withdraw into pre-established patterns that end up closing our horizon to the creative action of God. God stepped outside of Himself to come among us, He pitched His tent among us to bring the mercy of God that saves and gives hope. Even if we want to follow Him and stay with Him, we must not be content to remain in the enclosure of the ninety-nine sheep, we have to "step outside", to search for the lost sheep together with Him, the one furthest away. Remember well: stepping outside of ourselves, like Jesus, like God has stepped outside of Himself in Jesus and Jesus stepped outside of Himself for all of us.

Some might say to me, "But, Father, I have no time", "I have so many things to do", "it is difficult", "what can I do with my little strength?", with my sin, with so many things? Often we settle for a few prayers, a distracted and inconsistent presence at Sunday Mass, a random act of charity, but we lack this courage to "step outside" to bring Christ. We are a bit like St. Peter. As soon as Jesus speaks of the Passion, Death and Resurrection, of self-giving, of love for all, the Apostle takes him aside and rebukes him. What Jesus says upsets his plans, seems unacceptable, undermines the sense of security that he had built up, his idea of the Messiah. And Jesus looks at the disciples and addresses Peter with perhaps one of the strongest words of the Gospel: "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do"(Mk 8:33). God always thinks with mercy: do not forget this. God always thinks with mercy: our merciful Father. God thinks like a father who awaits the return of his child and goes to meet him, sees him come when he is still far away ... What does this mean? That each and every day he went out to see if his son was coming home. This is our merciful Father. It is the sign that he was waiting for him from the terrace of his house; God thinks like the Samaritan that does not approach the victim to commiserate with him, or look the other way, but to rescue him without asking for anything in return, without asking if he was Jew, if he was pagan, a Samaritan, rich or poor: he does not ask anything. He does not ask these things, he asks for nothing. He goes to his aid: This is how God thinks. God thinks like the shepherd who gives his life to defend and save his sheep.

Holy Week is a time of grace which the Lord gifts us to open the doors of our hearts, our lives, our parishes - what a pity, so many parishes are closed! - in our parishes, movements, associations, and to "step outside" towards others, to draw close to them so we can bring the light and joy of our faith. Always step outside yourself! And with the love and tenderness of God, with respect and patience, knowing that we put our hands, our feet, our hearts, but then it is God who guides them and makes all our actions fruitful.

May you all live these days well, following the Lord with courage, carrying within a ray of His love for all those whom we meet.

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