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Pope Francis extols 'gift of tears'

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The Francis Chronicles

Although we focus much of our attention on Pope Francis' smiles and spontaneity, looking closer, we can also find that he is gently but firmly imploring us to weep.

On Saturday, at the Mass for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Francis challenged Catholics to come face to face with human misery so they can fully appreciate Jesus' crucifixion.

"First of all the mystery of the cross," he said, according to Vatican Radio. "It can only be understood, a little bit, by kneeling, in prayer, but also through tears. They are the tears that bring us close to this mystery."

Francis said if we let ourselves cry, we can then recognize "the cry of the penitent, the cry of the brother and the sister who are looking upon so much human misery."

But, he assured the congregation, "Mary will make us understand how great and humble this mystery [of the cross] is; how sweet as honey and how bitter as aloe. That she will be the one who accompanies us on this journey, which no one can take if not ourselves. Each one of us must take it. With the mother, weeping and on our knees."

Francis has urged such weeping several times in his first six months as pope. When he visited the Italian island of Lampedusa in July, he met refugees just arriving by boat from Africa and the Middle East.

"Who has wept for the deaths of these brothers and sisters?" Francis asked during a homily at Mass there. "Who has wept for the people who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who wanted something to support their families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of 'suffering with'; the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability

to weep."

Again, Francis challenged us to "ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves, and even in those who anonymously make socio-economic decisions that open the way to tragedies like this.

"Who has wept? Who in today's world has wept?"

Why is Francis asking us to cry? Many would say there is enough tragedy in the world, and we should try and stay positive. Francis, paradoxically, is trying to show us that mourning is positive. When we relate so intimately with strangers that we can weep over their sorrows, we create an unbreakable bond of peace.

In an April homily, Francis told of "the gift of tears," a charism often attributed to saints. He encouraged the small congregation at Casa Santa Marta to ask the Lord for the ability to weep like Mary Magdalene at Christ's tomb.

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"All of us have felt joy, sadness and sorrow in our lives, [but] have we wept during the darkest moment? Have we had that gift of tears that prepare the eyes to look, to see the Lord?" Francis asked.

"We, too, can ask the Lord for the gift of tears," Francis said. "It is a beautiful grace ... to weep praying for everything: for what is good, for our sins, for graces, for joy itself. ... [It] prepares us to see Jesus."

And in Jesus, we see our brothers and sisters, especially those naked, hungry, sick or in prison (Matthew 25). This leads us to Francis' recent declaration to fast and pray for peace in Syria.

For if we can imagine a stranger lying maimed or dead amid rubble, even our most hated enemy, and if we can taste their pain for even a moment, the tears we shed will certainly water the seeds of peace.

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