

MASS FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARMENIAN RITE

Vatican Basilica

Second Sunday of Easter (or Divine Mercy Sunday), 12 April 2015

**GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER
AT THE BEGINNING OF CELEBRATION**

*Dear Armenian brothers and sisters,
Dear brothers and sisters.*

On a number of occasions I have spoken of our time as a time of war, a third world war which is being fought piecemeal, one in which we daily witness savage crimes, brutal massacres and senseless destruction. Sadly, today too we hear the muffled and forgotten cry of so many of our defenceless brothers and sisters who, on account of their faith in Christ or their ethnic origin, are publicly and ruthlessly put to death – decapitated, crucified, burned alive – or forced to leave their homeland.

Today too we are experiencing a sort of genocide created by general and collective indifference, by the complicit silence of Cain, who cries out: “What does it matter to me? Am I my brother’s keeper?” (cf. *Gen 4:9; Homily in Redipuglia, 13 September 2014*).

In the past century our human family has lived through three massive and unprecedented tragedies. The first, which is widely considered “the first genocide of the twentieth century” (John Paul II and Karekin II, *Common Declaration, Etchmiadzin, 27 September 2001*), struck your own Armenian people, the first Christian nation, as well as Catholic and Orthodox Syrians, Assyrians, Chaldeans and Greeks. Bishops and priests, religious, women and men, the elderly and even defenceless children and the infirm were murdered. The remaining two were perpetrated by Nazism and Stalinism. And more recently there have been other mass killings, like those in Cambodia, Rwanda, Burundi and Bosnia. It seems that humanity is incapable of putting a halt to the shedding of innocent blood. It seems that the enthusiasm generated at the end of the Second World War has dissipated and is now disappearing. It seems that the human family has refused to learn from its mistakes caused by the law of terror, so that today too there are those who attempt to eliminate others with the help of a few and with the complicit silence of others who simply stand by. We have not yet learned that “war is madness”, “senseless slaughter” (cf. *Homily in Redipuglia, 13 September 2014*).

Dear Armenian Christians, today, with hearts filled with pain but at the same time with great hope in the risen Lord, we recall the centenary of that tragic event, that immense and senseless slaughter whose cruelty your forebears had to endure. It is necessary, and indeed a duty, to honour their memory, for whenever memory fades, it means that evil allows wounds to fester. Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it!

I greet you with affection and I thank you for your witness.

With gratitude for his presence, I greet Mr Serž Sargsyan, the President of the Republic of Armenia.

My cordial greeting goes also to my brother Patriarchs and Bishops: His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, His Beatitude Nerses Bedros XIX, Patriarch of Cilicia of Armenian Catholics; and Catholicosates of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Patriarchate of the Armenian Catholic Church.

In the firm certainty that evil never comes from God, who is infinitely good, and standing firm in faith, let us profess that cruelty may never be considered God's work and, what is more, can find absolutely no justification in his Holy Name. Let us continue this celebration by fixing our gaze on Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, victor over death and evil!

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Saint John, who was in the Upper Room with the other disciples on the evening of the first day after the Sabbath, tells us that Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you!" and he showed them his hands and his side (*Jn* 20:19-20); he showed them his wounds. And in this way they realized that it was not an apparition: it was truly him, the Lord, and they were filled with joy.

On the eighth day Jesus came once again into the Upper Room and showed his wounds to Thomas, so that he could touch them as he had wished to, in order to believe and thus become himself a witness to the Resurrection.

To us also, on this Sunday which Saint John Paul II wished to dedicate to Divine Mercy, the Lord shows us, through the Gospel, his wounds. They are *wounds of mercy*. It is true: the wounds of Jesus are wounds of mercy. "With his stripes we are healed" (*Is* 53:5).

Jesus invites us to behold these wounds, to touch them as Thomas did, to heal our lack of belief. Above all, he invites us to enter into the mystery of these wounds, which is the mystery of his merciful love.

Through these wounds, as in a light-filled opening, we can see the entire mystery of Christ and of God: his Passion, his earthly life – filled with compassion for the weak and the sick – his incarnation in the womb of Mary. And we can retrace the whole history of salvation: the prophecies – especially about the Servant of the Lord, the Psalms, the Law and the Covenant; to the liberation from Egypt, to the first Passover and to the blood of the slaughtered lambs; and again from the Patriarchs to Abraham, and then all the way back to Abel, whose blood cried out from the earth. All of this we can see in the wounds of Jesus, crucified and risen; with Mary, in her *Magnificat*, we can perceive that, "His mercy extends from generation to generation" (cf. *Lk* 1:50).

Faced with the tragic events of human history we can feel crushed at times, asking ourselves, "Why?". Humanity's evil can appear in the world like an abyss, a great void: empty of love, empty of goodness, empty of life. And so we ask: how can we fill this abyss? For us it is impossible; only God can fill this emptiness that evil brings to our hearts and to human history. It is Jesus, God made man, who died on the Cross and who fills the abyss of sin with the depth of his mercy.

Saint Bernard, in one of his commentaries on the Cantic of Canticles (Sermon 61, 3-5: *Opera Omnia*, 2, 150-151), reflects precisely on the mystery of the Lord's wounds, using forceful and even bold expressions which we do well to repeat today. He says that "through these sacred wounds we can see the secret of [Christ's] heart, the great mystery of love, the sincerity of his mercy with which he visited us from on high".

Brothers and sisters, behold the way which God has opened for us to finally go out from our slavery to sin and death, and thus enter into the land of life and peace. Jesus, crucified and risen, is the way and his wounds are especially full of mercy.

The saints teach us that the world is changed beginning with the conversion of one's own heart, and that this happens through the mercy of God. And so, whether faced with my own sins or the great tragedies of the world, "my conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord: 'he was wounded for our iniquities' (*Is* 53:5). What sin is there so deadly that it cannot be pardoned by the death of Christ?" (*ibid.*).

Keeping our gaze on the wounds of the Risen Jesus, we can sing with the Church: "His love endures forever" (*Ps* 117:2); eternal is his mercy. And with these words impressed on our hearts, let us go forth along the paths of history, led by the hand of our Lord and Saviour, our life and our hope.