

the pope said that the hearts of men and women are like “a battlefield” where the spirit of God and the spirit of the world “fight each other.” “We all have what we can call these two ‘spirits’: The spirit of God that leads us to do good deeds, to charity, to brotherhood, to adore God, to know Jesus, to do many works of charity, to pray; and another, which is the spirit of the world that leads us to vanity, pride, arrogance, gossip - an entirely different path,” he said. God’s spirit is a “great gift,” the pope said, and the only way to protect it and “drive away the spirit of the world” is by doing a daily examination of conscience.

If Christians do not reflect on “what happens in their hearts,” he added, they risk becoming “like animals who understand nothing and go by instinct.”

“We are not animals, we are children of God, baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” Francis said. “That is why it is important to understand what happened today in my heart. The Lord teaches us to always do, every day, the examination of conscience.”

The pope said that pride is “the most dangerous attitude of every Christian life,” warning that arrogance can “also infect people who live an intense religious life.”

“There are glaring sins that make noise, and there are also devious sins, which lurk in the heart without us even realizing it. The worst of these is pride,” Francis said.

The sin of pride divides people and makes us presume to be better than others, he explained. “We always remain children who owe everything to the Father.”

Pope Francis said that when we go through difficult days, we must always remember that life is a miracle that God has created from nothing.

“In this life we have received so much: existence, a father and a mother, friendship, the wonders of creation,” he said.

"If you love, it is because someone next to you has awakened you to love, making you understand how in it lies the meaning of existence," he explained.

Pope Francis called this principle the "mystery of the moon," which has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the sun.

"We love because we have been loved, we forgive because we have been forgiven," he said. "None of us shines with our own light."

The pope said that understanding this can give us a greater empathy for others.

"Let's try to listen to the story of some person who made a mistake: a prisoner, a convict, a drug addict," Francis said. Without neglecting to consider personal responsibility, he said, you can ask yourself whether these mistakes are the result of a "story of hatred and abandonment that someone carries with him."

Pope Francis reflected on a line, "Forgive us our trespasses" as a part of his ongoing catechesis on the "Our Father" prayer.

"Lord, even the holiest among us does not cease to be your debtor. O Father, have pity on us all," Pope Francis prayed.

***"The mountains and hills that must be made low are pride, haughtiness and arrogance. Where there is pride, where there is arrogance, where there is haughtiness the Lord can't enter because that heart is full of pride."***

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Without making room for God's word in their heart, people will never be able to welcome and love all human life, Pope Francis said.

"Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love," the pope said in his message for Lent, which begins March 1 for Latin-rite Catholics.

"The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable," he wrote.

Released by the Vatican Feb. 7, the text of the pope's Lenten message -- titled "The Word is a gift. Other persons are gift" -- focused on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of St. Luke (16:19-31).

The parable calls for sincere conversion, the pope said, and it "provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life."

In the Gospel account, Lazarus and his suffering are described in great detail. While he is "practically invisible to the rich man," the Gospel gives him a name and a face, upholding him as worthy, as "a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast," the pope wrote.

The parable shows that "a right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value," he said. "A poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change."

But in order to understand how to open one's heart and see the other as gift, a person must see how the word of God operates.

One way to do that, he said, is to be aware of the temptations and traps the rich man fell victim to, derailing his search for true happiness.

The nameless "rich man" lives an opulent, ostentatious life, the pope wrote, and his love of money leads to vanity and pride -- "the lowest rung of this moral degradation."

"The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal," he said. "For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door."

Love of money, St. Paul warned, "is the root of all evils," and the pope said, it is also "the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion."

"Instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity toward others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace," he added.

The rich man's eyes are finally opened after he and Lazarus are dead; Lazarus finds comfort in heaven and the rich man finds torment in "the netherworld," because, as Abraham explains, "a kind of fairness is restored" in the afterlife and "life's evils are balanced by good," the pope said.

The rich man then asks for an extraordinary sign -- Lazarus coming back from the dead -- to be given to his family members so they will repent and not make the same mistake as he.

But, Abraham said the people have plenty of teachings with "Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them," the pope said.

This explains what the real problem is for the rich man's and those like him: "At the root of all his ills was the failure to heed God's word. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbor," the pope said.

The pope asked that Lent be a time "for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbor."

"May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need," he said, especially by taking part in the various Lenten campaigns sponsored by local churches.

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# Pope at Mass: Christians must not give in to failure

Pope Francis celebrates morning Mass at the Casa Santa Marta commenting on the "spirit of tiredness" that "takes away hope".

**By Linda Bordoni**

Reflecting on the First Reading of the day, which is taken from the Book of Numbers, **Pope Francis** said that at times Christians "prefer failure", leaving room for complaint and dissatisfaction, a perfect terrain, he said, for the devil in which to sow his seeds.

According to the Reading, the people of God, he explained, could not bear the journey: their enthusiasm and hope as they escaped slavery in Egypt gradually faded, their patience wore out, and they began muttering and complaining to God: "Why have you brought us from Egypt to die in this desert?"

“The spirit of tiredness takes away our hope,” the Pope remarked, adding that “tiredness is selective: it always causes us to see the negative in the moment we are living, and forget the good things we have received”.

*“When we feel desolated and cannot bear the journey, we seek refuge either in idols or in complaint... (...) This spirit of fatigue leads us Christians to be dissatisfied (...) and everything goes wrong... Jesus himself taught us this when he said we are like children playing games when we are overcome by this spirit of dissatisfaction.”*

## Fertile land for the devil

The Pope said some Christians give in to “failure” without realizing that this creates the “perfect terrain for the devil.”

They are “afraid of consolation”, “afraid of hope”, “afraid of the Lord’s caress” he said. Pope Francis lamented the fact that this is the life of many Christians: “They live complaining, they live criticizing, they mutter and are unsatisfied”.

*“The people of God could not bear the journey. We Christians often can’t bear the journey. We prefer failure, that is to say desolation.”*

He said it is the desolation of the serpent: the ancient serpent, that of the Garden of Eden. Here it is a symbol, he explained, of that same serpent that seduced Eve. It is a way, he continued, of showing the serpent inside that always bites in times of desolation.

## Fear of hope

Those who spend their lives complaining, the Pope said, are those who “prefer failure”, “who bear to hope”, “of those who could not bear the resurrection of Jesus”.

Pope Francis concluded inviting Christians to ask the Lord to free us from this disease. “May the Lord, he said, “always give us hope for the future and the strength to keep going”.

Topics

Pope Francis on Tuesday told Christians not to wear the crucifix only as a symbol of belonging but to look to Jesus on the cross as He who died for our salvation. The pope’s words came during morning Mass at the Casa Santa Marta.

Pope Francis noted that in today's liturgical reading Jesus says to the Pharisees three times: "You will die in your sins." That's because their hearts were closed and they did not understand the mystery of the Lord. "To die in your sins" he said, is a bad thing.

Reflecting on the First Reading in which the Lord tells Moses to make a saraph serpent and mount it on a pole and "whoever looks at it after being bitten will live," the pope said the serpent is "the symbol of the devil," the father of lies, he who caused humanity to sin.

And he recalled that Jesus said "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I *am*, and that I do nothing on my own." This, Francis said, is the mystery of the cross.

"The bronze serpent was the sign of two things: the sign of sin and of the seductive power of sin", and it was a prophecy of the cross, he said.

The cross, he continued, is not only a symbol of belonging, but it is the memory of God who was made sin for love. As Saint Paul says: "For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin."

Taking upon himself all the filth of humanity, the pope said, he was lifted so that all men wounded by sin would be able to see Him.

"Salvation comes only from the cross, from this cross that is God made flesh," he said.

And he pointed out: "There is no salvation in ideas, there is no salvation in good will, in the desire to be good...The only salvation is in the crucified Christ, because like the bronze serpent, He was able to take all the poison of sin and heal us."

Then the pope asked: "What is the cross for you? Yes, it is the Christian symbol. We make the sign of the cross, but often we do not do it well." For some, he said, the cross is like a badge of belonging, they wear it to show they are Christians, or even in search of visibility, they wear it as an ornament decorated with precious gems.

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But, he reminded the faithful: "God said to Moses "whoever looks at the serpent will live"; and Jesus said to his enemies "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am the son of God."

He who does not look to the cross with faith, the pope said, will die in his sins, will not receive salvation. Today, Pope Francis said, the church proposes "a dialogue with the mystery of the cross, with God who became sin for our sake." "Each of us can say He became sin 'for love of me'," he said.

Inviting all faithful to think about how they wear the cross, and how aware they are when making the sign of the cross, the pope concluded asking each of us to look to this God who became sin so that we do not die in our sins, and to reflect on the questions just suggested.

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The pope directed his attention to Jesus, who in the day's Gospel turns to the chief priests and the elders of the people, and focuses precisely on their role. "They had juridical, moral, religious authority," he said. "They decided everything." Annas and Caiaphas, for example, "judged Jesus." They arrived at this state of "arrogance and tyranny towards the people," the pope said, by instrumentalizing the law.

"But a law that they have remade many times: so many times, to the point that they had arrived at 500 commandments. Everything was regulated, everything! A law scientifically constructed, because this people was wise, they understood well. They made all these nuances, no? But it was a law without memory: they had forgotten the First Commandment, which God had given to our father Abraham: "Walk in my presence and be blameless." They did not walk: they always stopped in their own convictions. They were not blameless!"

And so, the pope said, they had forgotten the Ten Commandments of Moses. "With the law they themselves had made—intellectualistic, sophisticated, casuistic—they cancelled the law the Lord had made, they lacked the memory that connects the current moment with revelation." In the past their victim was Jesus; in a similar way, now their victim is "the humble and poor people who trust in the Lord," "those who are discarded," those who understand repentance even if they do not fulfill the law, and suffer these injustices. They feel "condemned," and "abused," the pope said, by those who are vain, proud, arrogant." And one who was cast aside by these people, Pope Francis observed, was Judas.

"Judas was a traitor....He sinned forcefully. But then the Gospel says, 'He repented, and went to them to return the money.' And what did they do? 'But you were our associate. Be calm.... We have the power to forgive you for everything!' No! 'Make whatever arrangement you can!' [they said.] 'It's your problem!' And they left him alone, discarded! The poor Judas, a traitor and repentant, was not welcomed by the pastors. Because these people had forgotten what it was to be a pastor. They were the intellectuals of religion,

those who had the power, who advanced the catechesis of the people with a morality composed by their

#### THOMAS MERTON ON EASTER (Seasons of Celebration)

Lent has summoned us to change our hearts, to effect in ourselves the Christian metanoia. But at the same time Lent has reminded us perhaps all too clearly of our own powerlessness to change our lives in any way. Lent in the liturgical year plays the role of the Law, the pedagogue, who convinces us of sin and inflicts upon us the crushing evidence of our own nothingness. Hence it disquiets and sobers us, awakening in us perhaps some sense of that existential “dread” of the creature whose freedom suspends him over an abyss which may be an infinite meaninglessness, an unbounded despair. This is the fruit of that Law which judges our freedom together with its powerlessness to impose full meaning on our lives merely by conforming to a moral code. Is there nothing more than this?

But now the power of Easter has burst upon us with the resurrection of Christ. Now we find in ourselves a strength which is not our own, and which is freely given to us whenever we need it, raising us above the Law, giving us a new law which is hidden in Christ: the law of His merciful love for us. Now we no longer strive to be good because we have to, because it is a duty, but because our joy is to please Him who has given all His love to us! Now our life is full of meaning!

Easter is the hour of our own deliverance— from what? Precisely from Lent and from its hard Law which accuses and judges our infirmity. We are no longer under the Law. We are delivered from the harsh judgment! Here is all the greatness and all the unimaginable splendor of the Easter mystery— here is the “grace” of Easter which we fail to lay hands on because we are afraid to understand its full meaning. To understand Easter and live it, we must renounce our dread of newness and of freedom!

Death exercises a twofold power in our lives: it holds us by sin, and it holds us by the Law. To die to death and live a new life in Christ we must die not only to sin but also to the Law.

Every Christian knows that he must die to sin. But the great truth that St Paul exhausted himself to preach in season and out is a truth that we Christians have barely grasped, a truth that has got away from us, that constantly eludes us and has continued to do so for twenty centuries. We cannot get it into our heads what it means to be no longer slaves of the Law. And the reason is that we do not have the courage to face this truth which contains in itself the crucial challenge of our Christian faith, the great reality that makes Christianity different from every other religion.

In all other religions men seek justification, salvation, escape from “the wheel of birth and death” by ritual acts, or by religious observances, or by ascetic and contemplative techniques. These are means devised by men to enable them to liberate and justify themselves. All the other religions impose upon man rigid and complicated laws, subject him more or less completely to prescribed exterior forms, or to what St Paul calls “elementary notions.”

But Christianity is precisely a liberation from every rigid legal and religious system. This is asserted with such categorical force by St Paul, that we cease to be Christians the moment our religion becomes slavery to “the Law” rather than a free personal adherence by loving faith, to the risen and living Christ; “Do you seek justification by the Law . . . you are fallen from grace . . . In fact, in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor its absence is of any avail. What counts is faith that expresses itself in love” (Gal. 5: 4,6).

. . . This gift, this mercy, this unbounded love of God for us has been lavished upon us as a result of Christ’s victory. To taste this love is to share in His victory. To realize our freedom, to exult in our liberation from death, from sin and from the Law, is to sing the Alleluia which truly glorifies God in this world and in the world to come.

This joy in God, this freedom which raises us in faith and in hope above the bitter struggle that is the lot of man caught between the flesh and the Law, this is the new canticle in which we join with the blessed angels and the saints in praising God.

God who is rich in mercy, was moved by the intense love with which he loved us, and when we were dead by reason of our transgressions, he made us live with the life of Christ . . . Together with Christ Jesus and in him he raised us up and enthroned us in the heavenly realm . . . It is by grace that you have been saved through faith; it is the gift of God, it is not the result of anything you did, so that no one has any grounds for boasting. (Eph. 2: 4– 9)

Let us not then darken the joy of Christ's victory by remaining in captivity and in darkness, but let us declare His power, by living as free men who have been called by Him out of darkness into his admirable light.

## Resurrection an invitation to see beyond pain, sorrow, and suffering

- [Father Jeffrey F. Kirby](#)

Apr 21, 2019

SENIOR CRUX CONTRIBUTOR

### Commentary

Happy Easter! This weekend, the universal body of Christian believers celebrates the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The event is the linchpin of the entire Christian way of life. As Saint Paul wrote, “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” The worldview that is given by the Resurrection is a radical one. Included among its many tenets is a call to forgive enemies, revere the human body, selflessly serve the poor, welcome the

stranger, protect the vulnerable, devoutly celebrate sacraments, study the Bible, and live a way of life ordered by prayer and spiritual discernment.

This course is as massively counter cultural today as it was two thousand years ago. And yet, this is “the way” that has always marked the Christian and made her different from her neighbors. In order for such a way of life to be possible, and to flourish without resentment or self-pity, a believer must fully embrace the Resurrection. It’s only by placing our self-abandonment within the light of eternity, and within a mosaic that involves a perspective beyond the confines of particular situations and personalities, that we can find strength, true peace and the means of perseverance. The Resurrection is an invitation to see beyond pain, sorrow, and suffering. It’s a call for us “to get out of ourselves” and our small, self-created worlds of vainglory and entitlement. It is a summons to freedom and spiritual peace. The Resurrection manifests the big picture of existence. It lifts the veil that shrouds death and reveals to us the reality of life that spans beyond time and space. The Resurrection shows us the bigger picture of existence. It offers us the fullness of life. In its light, therefore, mercy can be given since every offense is placed within its infinity. In the power of the Resurrection, every ordering of desires is worth the labor since our bodies will share in its glory.

In the illumination of the Resurrection, selfless service and a benevolent welcome to the stranger is made possible since every action is helped by grace and all people are cherished as fellow recipients of eternal life.

The Resurrection is the most powerful, earth-shattering, explosive event to ever happen in human history. It has fundamentally changed the human narrative and has drastically changed the course of how the human family interacts with itself. The Resurrection is an event to be reckoned with and one that demands attention.

The belief that the eternal God became a man, allowed himself to experience everything that is human, to die a horrific death in the midst of terrible mockery, and then rose from the dead and offered

his disciples a share in his glory is a creed that has turned monsters into saints and barbaric hordes into civil societies. Whether a person is a believer or not, the capacity of the Resurrection to form a community of like-minded people who wish to be instruments of mercy, respect, compassion, self-service and prayer cannot be dismissed.

The effects of such a worldwide body can be seen and felt in the lives of those who are sick, poor, rashly judged, and living on the peripheries of society and yet have been accepted, honored, loved and served by Christians.

The Resurrection is the culmination of all that is good and truly human. It is the elevation of the human into divinity. It is the work of God in bringing humanity to himself through the sacrifice and ministry of Jesus Christ.

This is the Resurrection. This is the event that inspires, molds and shapes the life of every Christian believer. It is the summons to goodness and the promise of eternal glory. This is what we celebrate today. This is Easter.

Happy Easter!

Leave that which is not,  
but appears to be.  
Seek that which is,  
but is not apparent.

Beloved Rumi 