



MISSIONARY OF THE HOLYFACE

BLESSED MARIA PIERINA DE MICHELI

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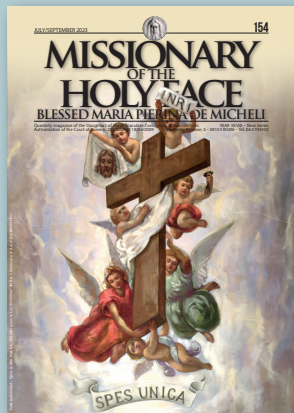
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154

JULY/SEPTEMBER 2023

SUMMARY

BEARERS OF
 A MESSAGE OF PEACE

Cardinal Mauro Piacenza

3

STANDING FIRM ON
 THE ROCK OF THE LORD'S LOVE

Father Luca di Girolamo

7

JESUS, BREAD OF LIFE

Father Luca di Girolamo

10

JESUS OPENS
 THE DOORS OF SALVATION

Father Luca di Girolamo

13

We have reached the 13th anniversary of the liturgical memorial of Blessed Mother Maria Pierina De Micheli, which falls on 11 September, the day of her birth.

We know that Mother Pierina was raised to the Honours of the Altars by Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, representing Benedict XVI, on 30 May 2010, in the Roman Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

Throughout these years, the memory of Mother Pierina's life and charism has always been present in the hearts and minds of her spiritual children. A characteristic that should be acknowledged is that whoever comes into contact with the Blessed Mother learns about and honours the Holy Face of Jesus. This is a fundamental and indispensable aspect. After all, this was Mother Pierina's mission: to spread devotion to the Face of Christ among the faithful. It was precisely this zeal that triggered the devil's reactions and created so much suffering and adversity for her. Blessed Mother paid with her very life for her fidelity to God's will and for her collaboration with Providence, so that the benefits of grace from the Face of Jesus would reach as many people as possible. Becoming an apostle of the Holy Face was a conscious choice for Mother Pierina that made her an instrument of mercy for the world.

There is no doubt that in her role as a missionary of the Face of Christ she became ever more like Him and was able to imitate His virtues. Her existence, thus became a hymn of praise to Divine Mercy and an invitation to draw from the sources of grace that flow from the pierced Heart of Jesus. Mother Pierina had the gift of also involving others in spreading devotion to the Holy Face, through the scapular that the Virgin Mary recommended she wear. It was later known that she had been granted permission to replace it with a medal.

On the other hand, zeal for the salvation of souls will always burn in the heart of the Blessed Mother, as a response to Divine will to save as many souls as possible. In this regard, let us recall what Jesus said to her on 27 May 1938: "Console me, and seek souls who sacrifice themselves with Me, for the salvation of the world".

Mother Pierina always responded to this invitation with her whole self and never failed in her promise to sacrifice herself to spread the Kingdom of God among souls. It is for this that we should be grateful to her: for passing on to us love of the Face of Christ and consequently, all of its benefits.

The Editorial staff



BEARERS OF A MESSAGE OF PEACE

The following is a discourse by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, President of Aid to the Church in Need, delivered during the presentation of the annual report on the persecution of Christians, at the Italian embassy to the Holy See on 22 June 2023.

My discourse aims to illustrate in two points, the “essential coordinates” to interpret the tragedy of the persecution of Christians and its possible consequences, both from a theological perspective and from a value-oriented and humanitarian perspective,

1. Martyrological Structure of Christianity

The first aspect that I think is essential to share has to do with what I would describe as the “martyrological structure” of Christianity. In more than 20 centuries of history, there has never been a time when Christians were

not persecuted, with varying degrees of hostility.

This reality belongs to the very history of Christian faith in the world. Historically speaking, Jesus of Nazareth was persecuted and condemned to death because of his actions and his words. We know and believe that his



sacrifice was freely and voluntarily given and we are well aware of its salvific value, but that does not eliminate the martyrological dimension, also and above all seen in the etymological definition of the term *marturya*, which means witness: Jesus Christ was a witness. He was “THE” supreme witness of God, who out of love for mankind and in order to save it, “turns against himself”. It would be unthinkable to believe that the “movement” born from Christ’s Cross and Resurrection would not undertake the same journey, even in the experience of a coherent witness of

persecution and martyrdom.

There is a dual challenge to comprehending this dimension today: a cultural one and a theological one.

Culturally speaking, the rejection of all suffering by contemporary society is the most serious symptom of the desperation into which it has fallen. Faced with the mystery of suffering, one cannot cheat, especially if it involves us directly. There are either reasons to stand before the suffering in an adult, strong, “virile”, at times even heroic way (but not stoic!), or it will be necessary to distract oneself or as the Latins would say, “*di-vertirsi*”, that is “to look elsewhere”, to look the other way. But this is never legitimate and should not leave us feeling at peace, neither personally nor socially. In the Christian offer to human intelligence and freedom, God is the Only One, who even in suffering, is the authentic Lord, having chosen to take it on completely, making himself man and offering his life on the Cross, in atonement for all of humanity’s evil. And He, the Risen One, continues to live his atoning passion through all the suffering members of His Mystical Body that is the Church, and in ways God only knows, even beyond. In this light, suffering is not something to be removed at all costs, in a desperate attempt to affirm the



“La vostra
resistenza
è martirio,
rugiada
che feconda”

*I volti della
persecuzione
anticristiana,
gli interventi
per non
lasciarli soli*

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“ego against God”, but rather it becomes a school of Hope.

The second difficulty is a theological one and has to do with the sometimes partial interpretation that has been given to the figure of Christ himself. Jesus is not a ... Spartacus, he is not a political liberator, a restorer of social or economic problems.

“Jesus, who himself died on the Cross, brought something totally different: an encounter with the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an encounter with a hope stronger than the sufferings of slavery, a hope which therefore transformed life and the world from within.” (Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, n. 4).

This transformation “from within” of life and of the world has its roots in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, and its summit is the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. From these historical and meta-historical events, a new anthropology emerges, which, whether it is acknowledged or not, is the profound and authentic, living and vital root of what today we call: human rights, freedom, respect. Rivers of ink were used to illustrate that the so-called “values of modernity” have profound and undeniable roots in Christianity. And to use the words

of Charles Péguy, not recognizing this makes our society a “society of parasites”, one that lives on the values it received but without recognizing their origins.

2. Duty to respect human rights and religious freedom

Religious freedom, as Saint John Paul II often said and Pope Francis has repeated is “*the mother of all freedoms*” because it is linked to freedom of thought and words, freedom of expression and assembly, and freedom of conscience and of worship. And because



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154

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5

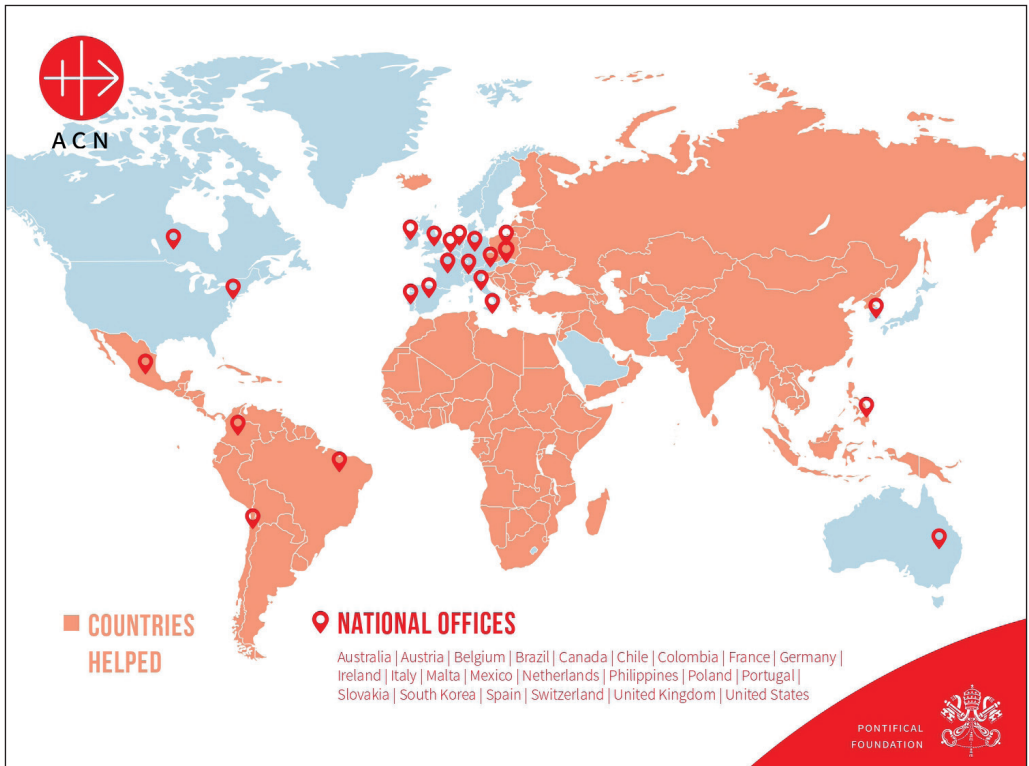
religious freedom has to do with the domain of meaning, the final horizon of existence, the movement of human reason that seeks to answer the fundamental questions of the ego, it should be considered even more fundamental than other indispensable freedoms. Wherever religious freedom is understood and guaranteed, all other freedoms are also guaranteed.

The work of Aid to the Church in Need is above all to offer practical support to the lives of Christians who live in

territories or situations of suffering. Wherever religious freedom is not guaranteed, and even freedom of worship is questioned, it is necessary to support, even financially, formation and education projects, as well as work and development, formation of the clergy and the various steps involved in the proclamation of the Gospel, in order to allow for a structured development of the Christian community, and thanks to its contribution, to help the cultures and territories in which they live.

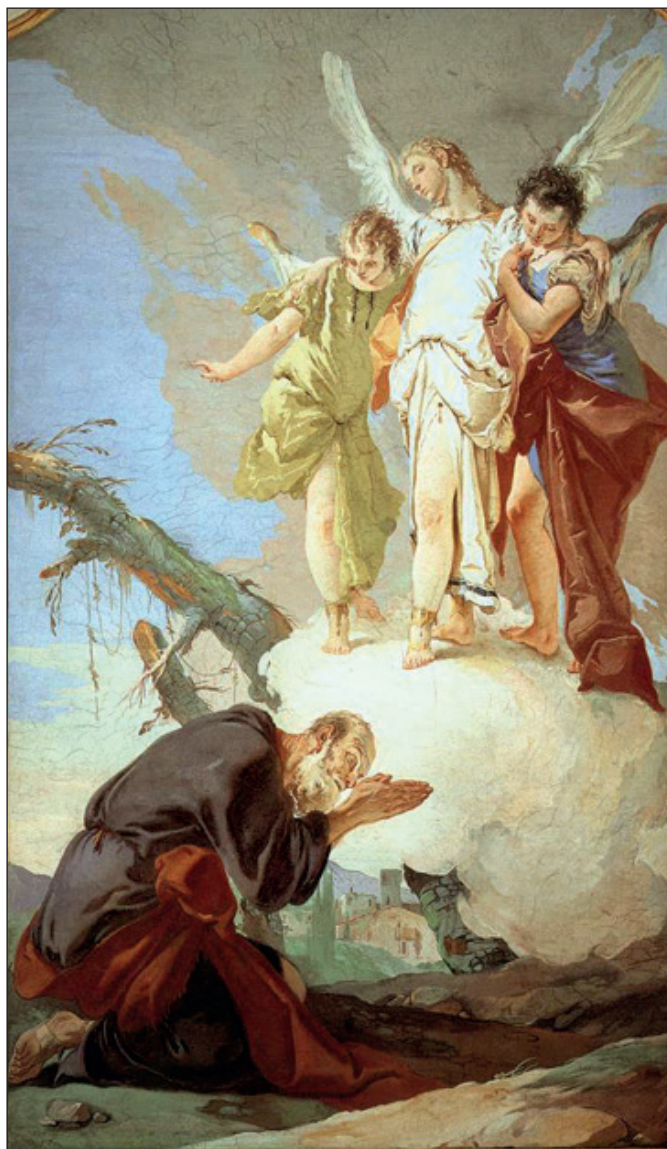
This support is indispensable to revitalise the legitimate claim of the right to exist, and with it, all other rights.

In order to support the practical life of Christians, especially in areas in which it is continually and constantly under threat, this service is not only for Christians themselves, but also for all humanity. Indeed, they are bearers of a message of peace, just as the Crucifix is the bearer of a message of peace. That peace that is so gravely threatened today, and tirelessly invoked by Pope Francis, one which, let us not forget, is the necessary premise for human development and healthy progress.



STANDING FIRM ON THE ROCK OF THE LORD'S LOVE

The following is a homily by Father Luca di Girolamo of the Servants of Mary, delivered on Monday, 26 June 2023 in the Chapel of the Institute of the Holy Spirit in Rome.



To stand on the rock of the Lord's love means to build our life on Christ, the living stone. He is the true rock that gives meaning to our life and fulfils it. Aware of this need to "build", with our words and actions, let us ask the Lord's forgiveness for having set our hearts and minds on realities that do not fulfil or respond to our needs.

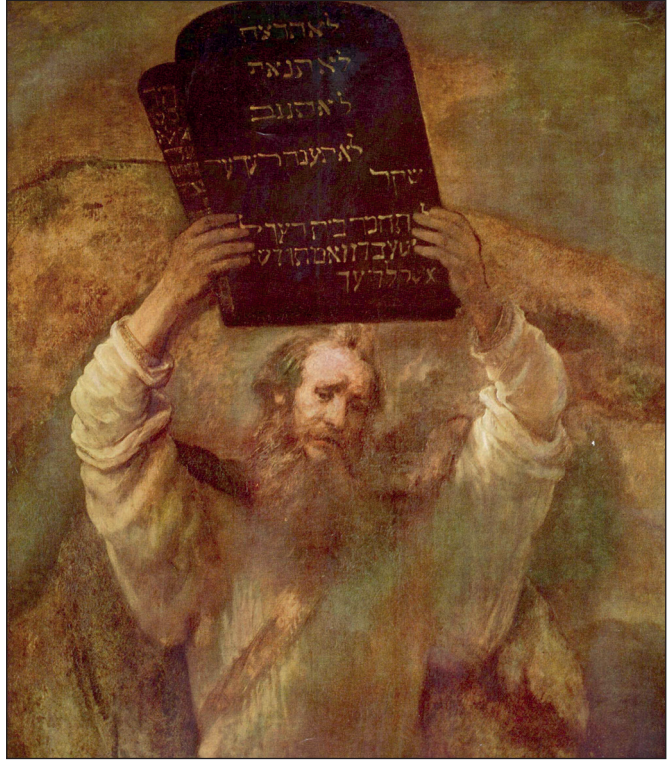
Abraham's vocation suddenly marks a new page in history that interrupts a story of sin, dispersion and death that starts from Chapter III and ends on Chapter XI. It begins with the fall of Adam and Eve, then moves on to the killing of Abel and then other acts of vengeance until we reach the monument of human pride, represented by the Tower of Babel. With Abraham we really have the builder standing on the rock, represented by the Word of God. With Abraham we really have a builder



standing on the rock, like Mary, the Mother of God, would later be in the New Testament.

All this is synonymous with faith, understood precisely as adherence to the plan that the Lord has established for our fulfilment and our salvation. Hence, we understand how His Word should be listened to and this listening is for our good, which in the story of Abraham resulted in numerous descendants, called to make known the love that God has for the nations and with it the very nature of God who is love, mercy and forgiveness.

Unfortunately, with



the passing of time, people have grown “comfortable”, in a guilty way, with respect to God’s predilection, even forgetting the reason and purpose of this choice, which is to make the true God-Love known and to bring to Him all those who are distant from Him. All this sinful phenomenon is manifested especially in interpersonal relationships. The Law, given to Moses for deliverance and salvation followed the paths of legalism so that, once the Lord Jesus entered the world, here He lays bare all its hypocrisy. Something similar, unfortunately, also happened to the Church of the past Hypocrisy/Hypocrite: this is a strong accusation that Jesus addresses to the doctors of the Law, but also to the disciples who follow him. A hypocrite is one who sees in a biased way but at the same time thinks he/she is



right and worth more than others. Hence, we understand how the disproportion between a speck and a log is particularly effective. A depiction – by the way – that has also entered our way of pointing out how judgement of others should not be rushed. The speck-log pair is thus a wake-up call for each one of us, not so much to be generous and forgiving, but rather to reflect carefully on our actions and words and on their degree of positivity. Only by removing what obscures, what prevents us from seeing well, will we be able to speak our mind and correct the attitude of others. In this way, we could say that we have accomplished something good and fruitful for us and for others, joined by a single process of real purification.



JESUS, BREAD OF LIFE

The following is a homily by Father Luca di Girolamo of the Servants of Mary, delivered on 26 April 2023 in the Chapel of the Institute of the Holy Spirit in Rome.

Often our prayers, especially those in the Rite for Holy Mass, speak of inherited eternity. It is associated with the Kingdom and with life without end, which the Lord gave us with his Passion. We all have the opportunity to enjoy this 50-day period from the Resurrection that will lead us to Pentecost.

This event has liberated

us and this action of grace endures when we ask and receive forgiveness for our sins. Let us renew this request for forgiveness at the beginning of our Holy Mass in honour and in memory of Mother Pierina.

The long discourse Jesus makes in chapter 6 of the Gospel according to John is set within a particular sign that Jesus performs, even though his disciples can see no way out to resolve a specific problem: a large number of people had come to listen to Jesus but they needed to be fed. There was very little bread and it was not enough. The Apostle Philip -- who continues Jesus' action in the First Reading -- informs Jesus, who replies by inviting him to offer the little they had. However, unexpectedly the bread is





enough for everyone, and there are even leftovers. Jesus had performed a sign: the multiplication of the loaves, which in the Gospel according to John, like all of Jesus' unique signs, is a sign of his power.

However, as with all of Jesus' signs, the multiplication of the loaves was not an isolated event or one devoid of a word or comment by Jesus. This can be seen in all the evangelists: when there is a healing, Jesus usually addresses the man or woman involved with phrases such as, "your faith has saved you" or, when faced with a sinner who has been freed from sin, "Go and do not sin again".

Here the issue is more complex, and all of chapter 6 is a great teaching that gradually leads to the Eucharist. Let us remember that John presents to us the Last Supper, but only restricted to the washing of the feet, and he does not report the account found in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke and in the writings of Saint Paul, which include the Institution of the Eucharist with the same words that we hear today: "Take and eat – Take and drink".

However, even though there is no account of this, in John's account Jesus explains the effects of this sacrament. What are they? Undoubtedly, there is the promise of eternal life, but there are two more aspects that should be highlight-

ed: the unity of the human person and being inserted into a virtuous cycle, portrayed by the Most Blessed Holy Trinity.

Both of these aspects lead to the confirmation of eternal life. Let us see what this means. The unity of the human person. Jesus characterises himself as bread of life and links bread with hunger and believing with thirst. Further on in the account, the element of wine/blood also comes into play. Believing, welcoming all the richness that the Lord offers us in that bread and in that wine is an event that restores us physically and imbues us with a unique spiritual



strength, and this occurs also in cases in which some people with very strong faith nourish themselves with the Eucharist alone.

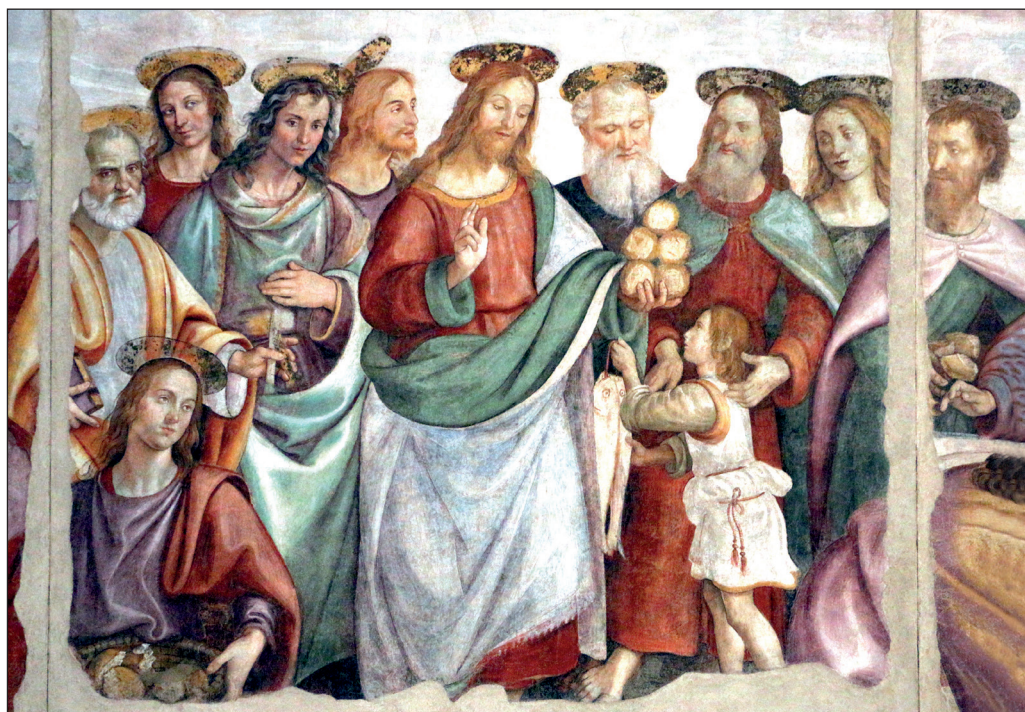
We can see this and affirm it also starting from our own humanity: when we are sick, we are essentially sad and this sadness – even in people who have great faith – is a feeling that has to do with our psyche and no less importantly, we do not have a great desire to eat and this weakens our strength. The body, matter and the dimension of the soul cannot be separated. But this unity is binding, and linked to another aspect

which the text suggests.

Being part of a virtuous cycle: eating/believing nourishes the whole person, but this strengthening has a particular effect. Jesus came and with his Incarnation, he involved all human beings, giving himself as food in the Eucharist; we are inserted into that current of love and mutual self-giving, -- embodied by the Holy Spirit – that runs between the Father and the Son. And this is an extension of that insertion in Christ and in the Church that we obtained at Baptism. The Eucharist thus represents its fulfilment into our actions today, into our eating/believing (and obviously by acting in accordance with what we believe). We are already oriented towards eternal life and Christ guarantees us that resurrection that was put into action in him by the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Here then is the greatness of our vocation which derives precisely from the prayer we recited in our responsorial Psalm: “How awesome are your deeds”!

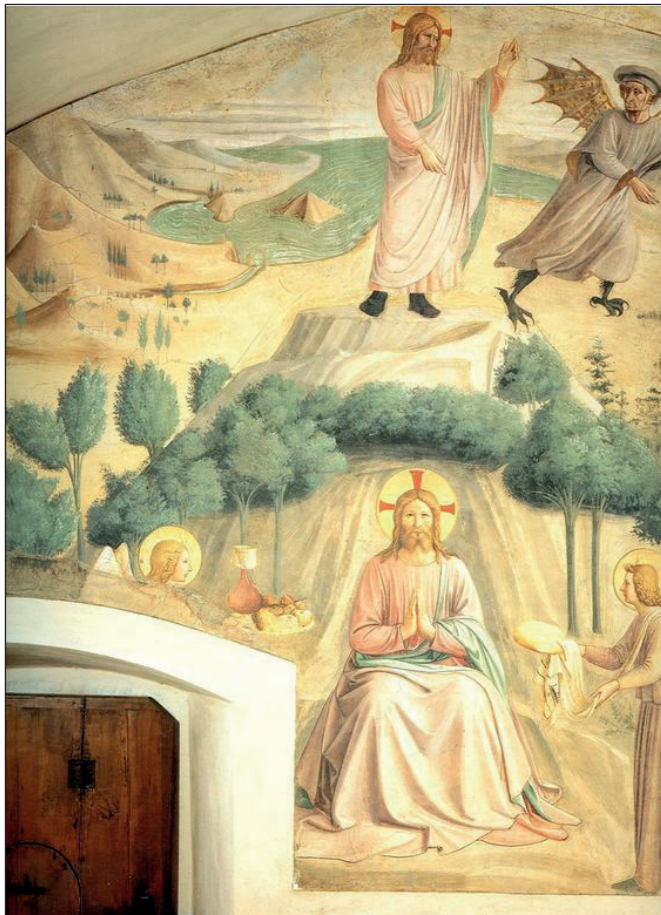
Entrusting ourselves to the intercession of Mother Pierina, who lived in the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to keep us in this state of grace! It is this very grace that makes us grow as people and as Christians.



JESUS OPENS THE DOORS OF SALVATION

The following is a homily by Father Luca di Girolamo of the Servants of Mary, delivered on the First Sunday in Lent, 26 February 2023, in the Chapel of Rome's Istituto Spirito Santo.

The fragility of our nature, which is highlighted during the period of Lent as a specific attitude of conversion, is assumed by the Lord at the time of his Incarnation. This process however, occurs concurrently with our entry into his salvific Mystery through Baptism which helps us in our journey of conversion.



Let us allow ourselves to be bathed by the water, which was strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and puts us in the best conditions to receive the Word and the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The first context that is presented to us in the Sunday Lenten journey is temptation. It is a difficult testbed for Jesus who gets there, albeit spurred by the Spirit, in the fullness of his humanity. Even while sharing his divinity with the Father, He is bonded with all the human dimension that leads him to experience hunger. He fasts for 40 days in an inhospitable place – as the desert is – and he highlights a completely normal need: when people fast, there's nothing much to be done about it, they feel hungry!!!

Thus, before us, Jesus the man turns up for the trial in all his uniqueness as a man. Weakness appears. Jesus himself experiences it but at the same time, he overcomes it. All that is darkness and ambiguity is



overcome by this man who is aware of his mission and who cannot and does not want to stray from it. The only project that was given to him by the Father is salvation and this has to come before everything.

We know everything about this episode: the dynamic of the three temptations that have precise meanings, but which are not the only ones. But let us linger for a while on the meaning of temptation and how it takes place: it is a trial in which we are in a position to confirm our trust in God. However, it still has a strategy: the tempter (but also the opportunity that arises) starts from one point which is, “if you are truly man, do this and this....”. And this is stronger in the case of Jesus, “if You are the Son of God” This takes on a strong significance if we realize that this scene of temptation takes place immediately after the Baptism of the Lord, where a voice can be heard from on high saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him”!

It is not only the old Adversary depicted in the First Reading, the tempter who is trying to distract Jesus from his task. What is astonishing is that skimming through the pages of the New Testament, even the ones who were closest to Jesus, including his friends



will suggest or make Jesus understand that there are easier escape routes. But Jesus rejects them all because they are the fruit of a worldly mindset, and he does this because it is necessary to pass through the narrow door.

Peter, for example, is the enthusiast who becomes Satan, an obstacle to God’s plan, when he hears about the Teacher’s destiny. Mary and Joseph become the voice of anguish, to which Jesus replies that he has to take care of the things of the Father. Some disciples by word of Peter – we will see this next week – want to stop time, build three huts on the Mount of the Transfiguration, not respecting the difficult journey that leads to true glory and is capable of including even the moment and the Time of darkness. For the moment however, we are with Jesus on this page where he is in the desert. It is a well-organized page (not the sketchy compositions that are typical of Matthew), one which starting with Christ’s victory, should remind us that all his and our existence are moments of trial to be overcome and in which to fail as little as possible.

The fact that we start from a failure that is described to us in the First Reading with the words: “You will be like God” – this fall, I was saying, should not make us fall into dejection. With his analogy, Paul says that Jesus himself opens the doors to salvation, a bearer of hope. The restoration performed by Christ is here and this is highlighted by Paul when he says that the first Adam was a figure of the future. However, spurred by

the Holy Spirit, Jesus is now in the desert and with only his humanity, he conquers the idolatry of material hunger. Incidentally, in his Letter to the Philippians Paul reminds us that there are some for whom their God is their stomach, and because of this, they walk towards destruction. On the contrary Jesus refers to another kind of hunger: not a physical and human one but one that has to do with the Word of God. As a man suffering from hunger, Jesus is still capable of directing his gaze beyond the human.

The same thing happens with the other two suggestions: a sensational cheap miracle is in contrast to respect for God's will.



A NO therefore to easy magic tricks – just as in the last suggestion of temptation -- and to power that is generated by and welded with greed. Here the tempter really makes a useless attempt because Jesus is the King of the universe and he has no need for the kingdoms of this world. Hence, worldly dominion should not be at the core of our thoughts, but rather the key concern, which Jesus will remind us in his mission, is that our names will be written in heaven. Having finished his task and having completely failed at it, the devil distances himself and disappears. Jesus, who is still humanly hungry, remains. He is comforted by angels, reminding us that he is truly man but that he also has a second nature; a divine, luminous and transcending one that he will reveal in the Transfiguration next Sunday.



