CONSTANCY AND THE TEARS OF SAINT PETER

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear faithful, on Palm Sunday we may feel somewhat disoriented. First the solemn blessing of the palms and the procession put us in an elevated, joyful mood. We recall how 2000 years ago Our Lord Jesus Christ rode into the holy city of Jerusalem and was greeted by the crowds of Jerusalem as the Messiah. People waved palm leaves in His honour, spread their cloaks on the road, and sang: "Hosanna in the highest."

Already a moment later, when the Passion of the Lord, the Passion according to Saint Matthew, is read at Holy Mass, our thoughts turn in a completely different direction. We contemplate the bitter Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We see how He is scourged, crowned with thorns, led out to Calvary, where He offers Himself as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.

We realize that the branches of the very same olive trees with which the Jews cheered in honour of the Lord Jesus will soon, already on Holy Thursday, wave in the Garden of Olives over the Saviour's body, trembling with fear, as He prays: "Father, if it is possible, take this chalice from Me, but not My will, but Thine be done." We realize that the very same people who today cry "Hosanna" will soon, already on Good Friday, in the courtyard of Pilate's palace, cry out: "Away with Him, crucify Him."

And all this begins to horrify us, my dear ones. This human inconstancy. Today the great king, the Messiah, and already on Good Friday hated by all, the abandoned Man of Sorrows.

Dear faithful, but on this Palm Sunday we must realize that we Catholics, living in the twentieth century, are by no means much better than that Jewish mob. After all, we too, again and again, cry: "Away with Him, crucify Him." We too, my dear ones, prove to be inconstant people, people ready for great declarations, great promises, who in the face of the slightest difficulties quickly forget those solemn promises and run away, run away, sinking into the depths of fear, into the depths of dread.

THE WEATHERVANE

Dear faithful, on this Palm Sunday we must reflect in a special way on how things stand with perseverance, with constancy in my Catholic life. Am I not like a weathervane in the wind? Is it not so that very often I make decisions in my life under the influence of other people? Because I am afraid of what others will think of me, what others will say about me. Is it not so, my dear ones, that I have become a slave in my life, and that I gave myself into this slavery willingly?

On this Palm Sunday two ways open before us. One is comfortable and broad, on which we will most certainly have many companions, but it is the way that leads to hell. And the other way is narrow and stony, on which we may perhaps feel alone, but which will lead us to heaven. And today, my dear ones, every Catholic must make this choice.

Which way will you follow? Will you follow the way that everyone follows? You will speak and live like everyone else, like the demonocratic majority. And I assure you that if you do so, soon you will also begin to think like everyone else. Or will you rather choose the way that the Saviour shows you? The Saviour whose crown is a crown of thorns, whose throne is a wooden cross.

This choice, my dear ones, seems obvious to a Catholic, but it only seems so. Because, my dear ones, there is no constancy in us, there is no perseverance in us, because so often we live in fear and are more afraid not of what the Lord God thinks of us, but of what other people will think and say.

PETER'S DENIAL AND TEARS

Dear faithful, listening to the Passion according to Saint Matthew, Saint Peter becomes a figure particularly close to us today. Saint Peter, who on Holy Thursday in the Upper Room assured the Lord Jesus that he would not abandon Him, that he would remain faithful to Him, that even if everyone else ran away, he would be ready to go to his death with Christ. That very same night, just as the Lord Jesus had foretold to him, he denies the Saviour three times, he betrays Him three times.

But note a small detail in Matthew's Gospel. The servants of the high priest declare that he was one of them, saying to Peter: "For thy speech doth betray thee." And it is not only that Saint Peter was a Galilean, that he had a different accent. Saint Peter, my dear ones, had already been touched by God's grace. Saint Peter, my dear ones, had recognized in Christ the Lord the Messiah, the Saviour, whom he sincerely wished to serve, to whom he wished to remain faithful. And the fact that he had spent three years with the Lord Jesus, that for three years he had listened to His teaching and seen miracles, had already transformed him. His speech betrayed him. He spoke differently, thought differently, lived differently from others. God's grace had begun a great work in him, but at that stage he still lacked constancy, perseverance. He bent under the influence of fear, the fear which in our life always comes from the devil. The devil wants us to live in fear, to be afraid of other people, of what other people will say, what they will think, that something bad may befall us.

And Saint Peter, already touched by God's grace, that grace which was working in him, commits the betrayal, denies the Lord Jesus, cuts himself off from Him. But a moment later, when he realizes what he has done, that he has become a traitor, as we read in the Gospel, "he went out and wept bitterly." He went out and wept bitterly at the sight of the evil which in this struggle had overcome him. But these tears of penance which Saint Peter sheds are cleansing tears, tears that enable him to be reborn, to rise again.

Therefore, my dear ones, it is worth our contemplating today the example of Saint Peter the Apostle, the Denier. For after all, God's grace has touched us too, sanctifying grace was poured into us too through holy Baptism, and the Lord God has begun a good work in us too. And we too, my dear ones, sincerely desire to serve the Lord God. We desire to fulfil His will. We desire to be His servants, His followers. But in the life of each of us too there come moments in which we, as it were, lose our reason, in which under the influence of emotion and fear we are capable of betraying the Lord Jesus, of denying Him, of beginning to live without God.

And in such moments we must not forget the tears of Saint Peter, the tears that cleansed him, the tears he shed at the thought of his mistaken choices, of the fact that he had feared man more than God. And we must ask, my dear ones, that we never forget this example of Saint Peter in our life.

SPEECH THAT BETRAYS US

Touched by God's grace, we are called to grow in it, to become men of God, constant and persevering men, and our speech should betray us too, and we should think, live and speak differently from the sons of this world. If your speech does not betray you, if you live, speak and think like an ungodly man, then you are not worthy of being a servant of Christ. But if your speech does betray you, if you strive with all your strength to serve the Lord God and to fulfil His will, then always keep before your eyes the example of Saint Peter. Even if you take fright, even if you fall, there is still always room for the tears of penance, for tears that cleanse, for tears that move the heart of God Himself, for tears that open the way to obtaining God's forgiveness.

And may we, my dear ones, never be ashamed of these tears shed after the example of Saint Peter. May we, my dear ones, always be ready to rend our hearts and to empty them of all evil, of malice, of all that is corrupt, so that there may always be in us, my dear ones, a readiness to do penance, to ask pardon of God and of the neighbours whom we have wounded and offended by our evil deeds and mistaken life decisions.

HOLY WEEK WITH CHRIST

"My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay you here, and watch, and pray," says the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Olives. In these coming days, in this Holy Week, let us contemplate the bitter Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and pray for constancy and perseverance in our Catholic life. May we, my dear ones, no longer be like a weathervane in the wind. May we, my dear ones, not stop today, on Palm Sunday, at this solemn procession, meditating on the Lord Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but may we live through this whole Holy Week together with Him, walking after Him. For there is no morning of the Resurrection without the pain and suffering of Good Friday. There is no triumph without hard moments, moments of humiliation. There is no life without death.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.