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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness to all of you during these difficult moments, assuring you of his prayers. As we begin Holy Week, a Holy Week unlike any of us have experienced, I greet all of you joining this liturgy by television and the internet and invite you to enter, with me, into the mystery of Christ's Passion.

This week marks Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, where He will fulfill His destiny as Redeemer and King. He will conclude His earthly journey, when He will be raised on the royal throne of the cross. He enters the Holy City with the clear awareness that the hour has come to reveal His royal and messianic identity to all. He enters Jerusalem as a king, as the Messiah, but not as a political Messiah. He knows that there in a few days He will conclude His Passion.

He enters as a king to say that Israel's great messianic expectation is fulfilled, that the new covenant between God and His people will now take place in a definitive way. What was expected from the coming of the King-Messiah? It was expected that he would sit in judgment of the people, that he would bring life and peace, and that he would defeat the enemy; and, at the arrival of the messianic times, a great banquet would have been set for all people.

Jesus will really do all this, but the throne from which He will judge will be that of the Cross. He will judge the people of the earth worthy of His love and Salvation, and the rejection and misunderstanding will not suffice to make him back down from this judgment: it is a definitive judgment.

But it is not merely a time of judgment. The Holy Father suggested, in his *Urbi et Orbi* address, that the Lord is "calling on us to seize this time of trial as a *time of choosing*...: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary and what is not." (Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* address, 27 March 2020)

As the Just Judge, Jesus will judge that the life of every man and woman will be worth more than His. He will offer His life as a ransom for the many, and His main concern will be for destiny of His subjects.

Again, in that same *Urbi et Orbi* address, thinking of the storm that the pandemic presents in our world, the Holy Father, citing the disciples' words "*Teacher, do you not care if we perish?*", offered these words for our reflection:

Do you not care: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: "Do you not care about me?" It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement. (Ibid.)

What He is willing to suffer for them in enduring His Passion is proof that He cares. This King lays down His life for His subjects, and in doing so, He also shows solidarity with all those who suffer.

While Jesus' cry from the cross – *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* – resonates with those who suffer and feel abandoned, it is no ordinary cry of abandonment. He is praying the great psalm of suffering Israel, which is extended to the whole world. In His plea from the Cross, He brings the whole world's cry of the Father's seeming absence in the midst of great suffering, before the face, or really, before the Heart, of the Father. He takes on Himself all the evil, all the rejection, all the world's sin. Nothing will remain outside of this infinite embrace.

In praying these words of Psalm 22 from the Cross, Jesus also demonstrates what it means to be a priest and victim – one who lives for others. The Fathers of the Church, including Augustine, suggested that Christ prays these words as Priest and Head of the Body, uniting us all to Himself, and yet united to the Body, He carries with Him all our anguish and sufferings – as Victim.

But He also carries our hope. Jesus' suffering is endured in communion with us and for us, in a solidarity born of love. Nevertheless, Palm Sunday is not just about suffering; it is also about hope. Although we did not hear these words of Psalm 22 (We stopped with verse 24 in our Responsorial Psalm), the psalmist continues: *"For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. ... The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied ... All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations."* (cf. Psalm 22: 24; 26-28)

Yes, the Father hears the prayers of His Son on behalf of the suffering, and thus, we have hope. Christ is the true King, who defeats death, not by running away from it, but by entering into it, letting himself be taken by its shackles. Since He does this for love, death will have no power over Him, because all that is love is stronger than death.

I conclude with the words of our Holy Father:

The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith. We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love. ... The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. *Is 42:3*) that never falters and let us allow hope to be rekindled." (Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* address, 27 March 2020)

Through His Passion and from the place of suffering, there emerges hope, the hope for the victory of love!