Excerpts from the Palm Sunday Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis

St Peter’s Square; 33rd World Youth Day, Sunday March 25, 2018

Jesus enters Jerusalem. The liturgy invites us to share in the joy and celebration of the people who cry out in praise of their Lord: a joy that will fade and leaves a bitter and sorrowful taste by the end of the account of the Passion. This celebration seems to combine stories of joy and suffering, mistakes and successes, which are part of our daily lives as disciples. It somehow expresses the contradictory feelings that we too, the men and women of today, experience: the capacity for great love… but also for great hatred; the capacity for courageous self-sacrifice, but also the ability to “wash our hands” at the right moment; the capacity for loyalty, but also for great abandonment and betrayal.

Jesus enters the city surrounded by his people and by a cacophony of singing and shouting. We can imagine that amid the outcry we hear, all at the same time, the voice of the forgiven son, the healed leper, or the bleating of the lost sheep. Then too, the song of the publican and the unclean man; the cry of those living on the edges of the city. And the cry of those men and women who had followed Jesus because they felt his compassion for their pain and misery… That outcry is the song and the spontaneous joy of all those left behind and overlooked, who, having been touched by Jesus, can now shout: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”. How could they not praise the one who had restored their dignity and hope? Theirs is the joy of so many forgiven sinners who are able to trust and hope once again. And they cry out. They rejoice. This is joy.

All this joy and praise is a source of unease, scandal and upset for those who consider themselves righteous and “faithful” to the law and its ritual precepts (cf. R. Guardini, The Lord, Chicago, 1959, 365). A joy unbearable for those hardened against pain, suffering and misery. Many of these think to themselves: “Such ill-mannered people!” A joy intolerable for those who have forgotten the many chances they themselves had been given. How hard it is for the comfortable and the self-righteous to understand the joy and the celebration of God’s mercy! How hard it is for those who trust only in themselves, and look down on others, to share in this joy (cf. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 94).

And so here is where another kind of shouting comes from, the fierce cry of those who shout out: “Crucify him!” It is not spontaneous but already armed with disparagement, slander and false witness. It is a cry that emerges in moving from the facts to an account of the facts; it comes from this “story”. It is the voice of those who twist reality and invent stories for their own benefit, without concern for the good name of others. This is a false account. The cry of those who have no problem in seeking ways to gain power and to silence dissonant voices. The cry that comes from “spinning” facts and painting them such that they disfigure the face of Jesus and turn him into a “criminal”. It is the voice of those who want to defend their own position, especially by discrediting the defenceless. It is the cry born of the show of self-sufficiency, pride and arrogance, which sees no problem in shouting: “Crucify him, crucify him”.

And so the celebration of the people ends up being stifled. Hope is demolished, dreams are killed, joy is suppressed; the heart is shielded and charity grows cold. It is cry of “save yourself”, which would dull our sense of solidarity, dampen our ideals, and blur our vision... the cry that wants to erase compassion, that “suffering with” that is compassion, that is the weakness of God.

Dear young people, you have it in you to shout. It is up to you to opt for Sunday’s “Hosanna!”, so as not to fall into Friday’s “Crucify him!”... It is up to you not to keep quiet. Even if others keep quiet, if we older people and leaders – so often corrupt – keep quiet, if the whole world keeps quiet and loses its joy, I ask you: Will you cry out?

Please, make that choice, before the stones themselves cry out. +FRANCIS