



Homily "A new day"
Br. Livio Crisci, Minister Provincial
of the Province of Tuscany
La Verna, 17th July 2024

Dear brothers,

may the Lord grant you the gift of his peace!

Today I would like to retrace the journey experienced by Francis: the ascent to this mountain, the pause and the descent.

Saint Francis climbed to La Verna in 1224 to live the Lent in honour of St Michael the Archangel. These are the last years of his life: particularly critical and tiring years.

Francis' soul is tormented: the Order, born around him, is changing rapidly and this transformation entails the emergence of profound difficulties in relations with the brothers.

To this fact must be added the experience of illness. Not only the soul but also the body of Francis is put to the test: new illnesses - the one that had struck his eyes - and those previous, increase the inner torment.

Therefore, as he ascends to La Verna, Francis appears as the disciple laden with the cross.

Indeed, he presents himself as a living exegesis of those words that delineate the spiritual physiognomy of the one who follows Jesus: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Francis climbs the mountain of La Verna wounded in body and soul.

And how do we ascend? What do we keep in our hearts? What fatigue, what difficulty, what cross are we carrying? What wounds mark our path? What disappointments, misunderstandings, tendencies to close oneself off inhabit us?

The testimony of Francis ascending the mountain of La Verna laden with his cross is illuminating for us. He, in fact, reminds us that in a journey of discipleship there is no lack of trials and labours, failures and moments of barrenness.

However, faith reminds us that the ordinary cross, everything that causes irritation, the mishaps along the way are the instrument with which God moulds us, purifies us, empties us, prepares us for the encounter with him, the way in which the power of the Resurrection enters into us.

And here, at La Verna, the power of the Resurrection entered into Francis' life. The stigmata are the experience of Jesus' Easter, of his Passover.

If the ascent to La Verna represents for the Saint Francis the experience of "night", the pause on the mountain and the event of the stigmata represent the irruption of the "new day in his own life".

It is the day on which the night receives an answer; it is the day on which Francis experiences the closeness of the Lord; it is the day on which the finger of the living God draws in his flesh the effigy of the Crucified One; it is the day on which from the heart of Francis gushes forth the Praises of God most high and at the same time from his lips is pronounced the Blessing that restores peace to Brother Leo, spiritually tempted; it is the day on which the Stigmatised of La Verna comes to look at the tensions and torments of the great temptation in the light of the paschal mystery; it is the day on which the disciple of Christ has become his faithful image. This last passage must also take place in our lives.

In fact, the one who has been seduced by the Lord (Jer 20:7) does not limit himself to listening to his words, but: "His aspiration is to empathise with him, taking on his sentiments and form of life [...] The evangelical counsels, with which Christ invites us [...] to share his experience as a chaste, poor and obedient, require and

manifest in those who accept them, the explicit desire to be totally conformed to him" (VC 18).

Dear brothers, as consecrated persons we are called to be icons, made of flesh and blood, of the Poor and Crucified Christ.

Francis descended from this mountain carrying the effigy of Christ drawn in his flesh by the finger of the living God.

Wounded by divine love, he yearned to begin again to serve the lepers and proclaim the Gospel.

Transformed by Christ's Passover, Francis immersed himself in history to meet his brothers and sisters in order to restore to them that "sweet and beautiful" gaze with which he himself was looked upon at La Verna.

We too, descending from this holy mountain, immerse ourselves in history, in our own realities.

We immerse ourselves animated by the desire to identify with the Poor and Crucified Christ. This means being willing to share his destiny.

The moment we make ourselves available to share what was Jesus' destiny, we are conformed to him. Jesus' destiny was the Cross, heralded by rejection, obstinate opposition, persecution.

Indeed, the Son of God, entering the world as the definitive Word of salvation, experienced the drama of non-acceptance (cf. Lk 2:7; 9:51ff; Jn 1:5.11).

The consecrated person is not exempt from such a situation: by adhering to Jesus, he hands himself over to history as the *word of Gospel*, delivering to the world a witness of life that presents itself as a *living exegesis of the Gospel*, exposing himself to the real possibility of experiencing misunderstanding, closure, rejection and persecution.

Wounded by such situations, the disciple of Christ does not hide, does not compromise, but by opening himself and allowing himself to be enlightened by the Easter of Jesus, he remains faithful to his being a *living Gospel*.

For him, the wounds he has received are not a cause for resentment, anger or resignation, but rather events that - reminding him of the Master's fate - make him share in his cross: "I complete in my flesh," he says, "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (cf. Col 1:24).

Dear brothers, let us immerse ourselves in history, carrying in our hearts the last words spoken by the Seraphic Father before leaving this world: "I have done my part; may Christ teach you yours" (LegM XIV, 3).

These words, as John Paul II said, "do not represent a satisfied withdrawal into himself, but a humble thanksgiving for what the Lord had accomplished in him. Their meaning is none other than this: may Christ teach you, as he taught me, to be his disciples".