

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear sisters and brothers!

It is good to be at home. It is good for things to slow down. It is good to be in silence, at rest. During this day of spiritual reflection, listening to the Word of God, to the voice of the Lord, as the Lord speaks to us, I invite you to slow down. Turn off your phones, resist the temptation of your computer, unplug the noise and the news, and be with the Lord. It is good to be with the Lord. Though, He's always with us, but we are frequently distracted, running around, busy, talking, yapping and yelping. It's no wonder that we do not always hear His voice.

We may think that our present time is unique. And perhaps it is. Each moment is unique, because each moment is alive, and life is full of dynamism and change. We never step in the same water in the river, as it's always flowing. But it is a river and it is water. The tumultuous waters of our time have analogies in the past.

I do not know about you, but I've heard tales of unspeakable devastation, either in the Syracuse or New York City living room, where I would listen to the stories of my grandfather during World War I. He would describe grotesque scenes of carnage. He was in the cavalry, or rather in a canon division, as a blacksmith he had to shoe the horses and fix the artillery. Then, he would tell me his stories from World War II, when he lost his wife, my 44-year-old grandmother, from a debilitating disease, and then his 20-year old daughter, my aunt, who perished in the anti-Soviet resistance. When I reflect upon his tales, now it's a memory, it doesn't hurt, I don't feel his pain. It is the past, and it has found its peace in my mind, like the emblematic peace we experience when we go to war memorials or cemeteries.

Again, we may think that our present time is unique, as we are engrossed in complex global and national events. We are experiencing a global pandemic; perhaps we have lost our job; we helplessly watch an insidious war in our motherland of Ukraine; we observe unrest and injustice for many Americans because of their belief in God, the color of their skin, their gender, or social-economic status, when good citizens, policemen and priests are condemned for the failings of the few; and finally, perhaps our children are far away from us if not physically then in terms of very different values and world views. To the latter points, deep problems in our families is the turbulence that hit us deeply: the death of the loved ones, the loss of friends. These are real storms, and the pain is real and piercing.

So, I reach out to you, during this day of reflection and retreat, I encourage you to slow down and listen to how the Lord speaks and works. The Lord is the spirit unity. It is not a superficial unity, it's not just a local unity. It is a universal unity of all people who embrace Him. Fundamentally, the Lord wants His creatures and His creation to be united both on heaven and earth. All of our times united with eternity. All people with Him personally, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Lord gives us freedom and we often walk away. The Lord gave freedom to angels and some became demonic. And the devil, the *διαβολος* (*diabolos* Greek) divides. *Διαβολειν* in Greek means "to divide". To the points identified earlier, we are all experiencing personal and global strife; and it's at these times we need to make the time to focus on the Lord. To allow God to heal us, and make us whole, to restore our integrity, to lift up our dignity.

This is the meaning of today's message, and embracing opportunity to slow down.

This is the meaning of today. This is a great opportunity. Slow down. You may have noticed (pointing behind his back), we made the clock stop. We can't hear the ticking. We are not worried about racing forward. Again, slow down, we are not going anywhere. Just stop to listen to the voice of the Lord in our hearts.

My grandfather lived for 104 years. He lived in three centuries. He was born in 1898 and died in 2002. He was a man of peace. He'd gone through two World Wars, he had seen great carnage, he saw his family torn apart. He had to flee multiple times from armies and security agents that sought to have him inform on neighbors. So, he fled crossing international lines, more than once. And then, DP camps, in the end he immigrated, but along the way witnessed the death of member of the family. Never did he return to see his home and his blacksmith's shop. But in his life's journey, he found peace. And with me, and with my brother, his grandsons, he shared humor and hope.

I hope this day will be a day for a relaxed heart, a gentle smile, and a day of inspiration for real hope and finding your peace in God.

We are, as our Holy Father says, all brothers, *Fratelli Tutti*. We are all sisters and brothers of Jesus. And we are all children of the Father.

May the blessing of the Lord be upon us.

May the mantle of the Mother of God cover us.

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