

## Facing Corruption: Daring to Hope against All Hope

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One can no longer count the number of occasions that Pope Francis has warned us about “corruption,” that endemic evil whose virulence in both society and the Church he is constantly denouncing, and has done so in every corner of the world. He describes it as *a tear, break, decomposition and disintegration*<sup>1</sup> that affects the human heart and, from there, contaminates society.<sup>2</sup>

“Corruption” — or When One Wearies of Transcendence

Corruption begins with small privileges granted by those who have fallen into the trap of *dialoguing with the devil*.<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis often describes the *slippery slope of sin that leads to corruption*. If sinners become aware of their sin, he tells us, they make changes, draw on the Divine Mercy and do their best not to relapse. Corrupt people, on the other hand, no longer see their sin; they are used to it, like the rich man who no longer saw Lazarus lying at his gate. Sinners even glorify their sin; they consider it a success, a form of acquired honesty. They no longer see that their choices destroy the social fabric and hurt the poor, the *modern Naboths*<sup>4</sup> (cf. 1 Kings 21).

Such an attitude is a particular threat for those who exercise power, be it political, economic, or religious. The situation of personal power reinforces the confinement in corruption, as happened to King David before Nathan made him see his sin.

None of us is immune to the futility that comes from being weary of transcendence. Hearts that are sure of themselves *are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests*,<sup>5</sup> because there came a time — often irreversible — when sin became corruption. Only a *culture of mercy*<sup>6</sup> will enable us to leave behind this deadly confinement. Then the soul that is internally suffocated without even knowing it can regain life.

Are We Immune to Corruption?

How are we, people of consecrated life, to receive this warning? Are we immune because we are consecrated people? Certainly not!

The Pope keeps reminding us that no one is immune to corruption. For example, Pope Francis tells us, if we become accustomed to the presence of beggars in our streets, if we get used to the stories of all kinds of violence on the news, we are already on the slippery slope of indifference and corruption. In addition, the more we are in positions of responsibility, the more corruption in all its forms will be waiting for us.

Hence, we are called to vigilance. But we are also called to action. Pope Francis is providing us with his own example through all the gestures and many speeches he gives

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Foreword to the book *Corrosion* by Cardinal Peter Turkson, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Joy of the Gospel*, § 60.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Morning Meditation of February 10, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Morning Meditation of June 16, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Joy of the Gospel*, § 97.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Foreword to the book *Corrosion* by Cardinal Peter Turkson, 2017.

denouncing social and ecclesial corruption. Just think of all his denunciations of human trafficking.

The Pope does not stop there. He invites us to “ask forgiveness” from the Lord for all the corrupt people of our time, to ask the Lord to “grant them the grace to repent, so that they don’t die with a corrupt heart.” And the Pope adds... “to condemn the corrupt, yes; to ask for the grace not to become corrupt, yes;” but “also to pray for their conversion!”<sup>7</sup> Hoping against all hope...

#### The Lord Entrusts Us with the “Pranzinis” of Our Time

Our prayer, that is the offering of our lives and the offering of our sufferings are of great value. Like all infirmities, both old age and illness can effectively repel the corruption of our time. I am thinking here of the hope of the young Thérèse praying for Pranzini. She was so grateful when she heard that this man who was damaged by corruption had wanted to kiss the crucifix before being guillotined! The Lord entrusts us with the “Pranzinis” of our time because these ‘souls in danger’ are being strangled by corruption. He wants us all to be artisans of his Mercy.

Let us remember the words of the apostle Paul: “It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Col 1:24). Paul has an astonishing conviction: however numerous might be the trials he has already gone through because of the Gospel, he has not yet come to an end, whether that be in his “flesh,” in his fragile humanity, in his participation in the Passion of Christ, in his participation in the work of Redemption.

#### With Mary, Working for Redemption

Before Paul, the first to be closely associated with the work of Redemption was the Virgin Mary. Who could describe the suffering of the Virgin at the foot of the cross throughout Holy Saturday? She is the mother of the crucified and her heart is immaculate, therefore her union with the Passion of Jesus is the perfect union, the fully fruitful union.

It is thus with and through her that we too can fully associate ourselves with the Redemption. We can be like John, who on Calvary did not stand near the cross, but rather stood near Mary, who was standing at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn 19:26).

If we clearly recognize that Jesus is the One Redeemer, that He is the Redeemer of the Virgin Mary herself, we can then name and contemplate the Marian mystery of union with redemption. We can come to recognize that the sufferings we offer associate us with this mystery, especially in view of the salvation of all those who are now locked in corruption.

#### The Humble and Loving Offering of Elderly Consecrated Persons

May the humble, loving and hopeful offering being made by the elderly consecrated men and women in our communities, who bear our world with entrails of mercy, be fruitful! Men and women religious who suffer are the Mary-at-the-foot-of-the-cross of our time. They are so precious – our brothers and sisters who suffer – for it is through their prayer and offering that they take care of the most lost. They silently extend their hands to them on the way to heaven!

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Morning Meditation of June 17, 2014.

Jesus has accomplished everything in his Incarnation and in the overabundance of love, that is his paschal mystery. Everything! However, a God who is communion cannot save us without associating us with his divine work. And when, along with Mary, we say 'yes' to this offering of ourselves, especially in favour of the most corrupt, heaven is being woven here on earth. Through this offering of self in the darkness of suffering and pure faith, the communion of heaven is already being woven.

Can one enter heaven without desiring that everyone succeed in entering? Certainly not! We do not enter heaven just by burning with mercy but by ardently wanting the most remote, the most wounded and the most corrupt to reach it. Heaven is communion: we enter it only by letting God expand our heart to a communion without measure. "In heaven, the blessed will be a heaven for one another," theologian François Durwell once shared with me.

How can one not be filled with gratitude for those who accompany others and accompany us on the way to heaven through their passion and prayer? Great and beautiful is the dignity of our aged consecrated brothers and sisters who unite with the Passion of Jesus, burning with desire that all may enter into the joy of the Resurrection! This is a powerful intercession! United at heart with the Virgin Mary, they will one day be able to make of their death itself an offering for the salvation of all. This will in turn become the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit who consecrates our offering and makes it astonishingly fruitful.

For our Personal or Community Meditation:

What forms of corruption should I be watching out for? What forms of corruption are there for my community?

Am I aware of the value of everything that I offer to the Lord for the salvation of the world?

Have I ever looked at my death as an offering to Love?