

**HOMILY AT MASS GIVEN BY ARCHBISHOP FOUAD TWAL,
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*"For the believer in Christ, there is great hope,
and to the non-believer there is a great offer"*

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Your Eminences, Excellencies, My brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a very great honour to speak to you today about the continuing miracle among us, that is the life of Jesus Christ in its most intriguing form in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which gathers us here, from Ireland and from all the corners of the world. I speak as one who shares with you the great hope and freedom of the children of God, that comes from our salvation in Jesus Christ. Though this life can be a *"valley of tears"* (*Psalm 84:6*) and although our humanity must face the darkness of *"the veil that is spread of all nations,"* (*Is 25:7*) yet, there is the grace that makes our hearts rejoice, because we are not alone, and our Saviour abides with us. (*Jn 15:4; Lk 24:13*) Thus in every moment, our humanity is renewed and we are able to give fitting gratitude and praise to our Creator in this Eucharistic Congress, in *"Communion with Christ and one another."*

God created the world as a place of life and love, (*Is 45:18*) and created every person to be loved, and things to be used. But the devastating reality of sin ruptured this plan, and so persons are abused and material things are more loved. The consequent pain and sorrow, sickness and suffering, have caused much struggle for men and women. However, for the believer in Christ, there is great hope, and to the non-believer there is a great offer: the true Light of the world! This is the light that darkness has not, and will not ever overcome. (*Jn 1:5*) The Eucharist, Jesus Christ Himself, is that ongoing visible event of life, the ongoing incarnation at the heart of the Church, and we see that the Light has set his tent among us. (*Jn 1:14*)

Realizing that Jesus is here with us, we joyfully say with St. Peter, *"Lord, it is good for us to be here."* (*Mt 17:4*) If we really believe He is present, then, by our trusting faith, His presence gives back to us joy and gratitude, which requires from us a certain behaviour in our life. His healing presence restores our humanity, even in the midst of persecutions by men and spirit.

As a reminder of our communion with one another in suffering, I come to you as the shepherd of Christ's little flock, (*Lk 12:32*) who suffer in the land of the promise, the land of the new and modern promises and international resolutions, that were never fulfilled. It is the land that first witnessed the fulfilment of God's plan, to redeem his creation in the Incarnation, suffering, death, Resurrection and Ascension of the Son of Mary, our Virgin Mother.

I am Patriarch of the city of Jerusalem, where the Sacrament of the Eucharist took place, and where our Lord *"took bread... broke it and gave it to [his disciples], saying 'This is my body which is given up for you. Do this in memory of me. '" (Lk 22:19)* The Eucharist originated in the Upper Room, in my Diocese of the Holy Land, where the miracle started, where your Mother Church is, and where your roots are. We renew in this Eucharistic Congress, the event that happened in Jerusalem. I feel at home with you, as we continue to celebrate the same event here in your midst. We are profoundly linked to this event.

Much has changed in this world after two thousand years. Yet the story is the same as it ever was. The Christians in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Church, were very few and found courage only in the presence of Christ. Today, we too, need to realize that Christ is with us, and find courage in His Presence. Though we are very few and diminishing in number, may we Christians in Jerusalem as well as all Christians, remain faithful where the Lord has placed us!

Considering the political situation in the Middle East, it is human to be afraid, because we suffer and feel threatened in our existence. But fear is not an acceptable response for a follower of Christ. Whether this threat comes from living in the conflict between Jews and Arabs, or bearing some personal, physical or emotional suffering, it is clear that our Lord wishes for us who bear His name, to continue to witness to faith in suffering. As Blessed John Paul II wrote, *"Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points, in which man is in a certain sense 'destined' to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way. "* (*Salvifici Doloris*, 2)

I often have the opportunity to pray on Golgotha, the very place where our Lord was crucified, which is now under the roof of the same Church that covers the place, where Jesus was buried and rose from the dead. As I stand and meditate on that spot, I hear the cry of Jesus *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"(Mt 27:46)* And today, we can hear the same cry through the sufferings of people: the victims of war, poverty and injustice, and the many refugees in the Middle East. This is the cry of a suffering human being, a cry that did not yield to defeat, but went on to victory, because *"we are more than conquerors through him who has loved us."* (*Rm 8:37*) Resisting the tendency to see ourselves as victims leading to self-pity is strong, and requires patience and determination. While we may feel alone, Christ is our hope, joy and freedom.

To whom do we turn in our suffering? Where is our attention focused, when we are enduring pain? Let us recall the *"woman afflicted with haemorrhage for twelve years, who was unable to be cured by anyone... She touched the tassel of his cloak and immediately her bleeding stopped."* (*Lk 8:43-44*) Today, we turn to Jesus and with a vibrant and determined faith; we touch not the edge of his cloak, but His very body, blood, soul and divinity. For us who have the Eucharist, it is the most efficacious and mysterious means by which we touch Jesus. He walks among us, as He walked in the company of the disciples of Emmaus; He is present in all our sufferings. Confident that He has not forsaken us and will never leave us orphans, (*Jn 14:18*) may this great truth captivate us, burn brightly in

us, and show in our way of living and way of relating. We have much, much more than his garment; we have his own flesh and blood in the sacrament of the altar.

Dear faithful, if, and when you suffer, do not be discouraged! The Eucharist is Jesus' most powerful statement of his desire to be with us, in our joyful moments as well as in our difficulties and challenges now and forever.

The gift of His Sacred Body and Blood may often be taken for granted. To help us fight this, Jesus, at times in history, has done something very specific and wonderful to assist us. We recall the very famous Eucharistic miracle that happened at Lanciano, in Italy in the year 700. In this miracle, the sacred host and precious blood turned from bread and wine, to having the appearance of human flesh and blood. In the 1970's, scientific experiments determined that this host consists of human heart muscle. Other Eucharistic miracles are well attested.

We are in union with Jesus this afternoon, as we partake of His Body and Blood. In this act of communion, we are invited to become one with Jesus, to become ourselves, a 'Eucharist.' When we receive the Body of Christ in faith, we begin to walk with him and in Him. St. Irenaeus wrote, *"Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."* (St. Irenaeus Adv. Haeres) As Jesus gave Himself to humanity, we too have to give our time and talents to the service of others, by our charity, collaboration and solidarity. Be proud of our Catholic Church, the pioneer in serving the poor, the needy and the sick, with institutions, hospitals, clinics and social services spread across continents throughout the world, even before the creation of states.

Certain that He is here, let us release our fears and hold firm to hope. Living in this freedom, will enable us to join others in their suffering, embracing them, recognizing in them the Suffering One.

And when, in the love of Christ, we embrace the person in front of us who is suffering, that person begins with a clearer understanding that God has not forsaken him. In this concrete way, we live out the event of the Eucharist.

It is a deep longing in the hearts of Godly men and women, to see our world restored to the Father's original plan. It is through the Holy Eucharist celebrated in faith and love, that this transformation will occur. Pope Benedict XVI in a Eucharistic meditation, said, *"the extraordinary prayer that Jesus offered and continues to offer for each one of us so that evil, which we all meet in our lives, might not have the upper hand, ... works within us the transforming strength of the death and resurrection of Christ."* *"From her earliest days, the Church has understood the words of consecration, as part of her praying together with Jesus."* (Wednesday Audience, January 11, 2012) This word on the power of the Eucharist, and how it transforms our suffering from an unwanted punishment, to a longed-for grace to be fruitful, we must grasp with a great heart. The prayer of the Eucharist is Jesus' prayer to the Father, that becomes our prayer. His life becomes our life.

We live at a time when projects and programs abound in the life of the Church. As the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, I am involved in many projects that seek to help the local Christians to remain rooted in their land, avoid emigration and encourage them to embrace their mission to be the "living stones" of Christ's presence in his own land. However, before all projects, the real help for us and for all Christians, comes from prayer, in recognizing and receiving our Lord in the Eucharist. He is indispensable and the Eucharist is that most substantial and mysterious means chosen by Him for us, to enter into His companionship, where we can live in His communion with the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Holy Land, we have more than 100 congregations of men and women religious, working with me in many sectors. Fifteen are contemplative communities praying in Eucharistic Adoration day and night. This is the treasure and the richness of our Diocese. As a Church, we are grateful to the many religious congregations devoting time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I rely on your prayers to bring forth peace and justice in the Holy Land.

In the words of Blessed John Paul II, *"Christ himself is present in the suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened once and for all, to every human suffering. All those who suffer have been called once and for all to become sharers in Christ's sufferings."*(*Salvifici Doloris*, 30; 1 Pt 4:13). *"Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross, we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man... And we ask all you who suffer to support us, to become the source of strength for the Church and humanity ...may our suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!"* (*Salvifici Doloris*, 31)

Dear friends, dear brothers and sisters who are presently enduring sickness and suffering, dear pilgrims from all over the world, in all our trials and struggles, let us call to mind these words: "Do not be afraid little flock," (*Lk 12:32*) "I am with you until the end of time." (*Mt 28:20*)

Should some of you find joy and fruitfulness in your suffering, you are greatly blessed. But some may not, and therefore, I encourage you to *"overcome the feeling of the uselessness of suffering, which consumes a person from within, and makes one feel a burden to those around, when in reality, suffering which is lived with Jesus, assists in the salvation of your brethren."* (*Benedict XVI, Blessing of the Sick, Fatima, 2010*)

Pope Benedict encourages us to *"welcome the call of Jesus and entrust to him every setback, every pain that you face, so that it all becomes - according to his design - a means of redemption for the whole world. Standing at the foot of the cross with Blessed Mary, you will be redeemers with the Redeemer."* (*Benedict XVI, Blessing of the Sick, Fatima, 2010*)

And so we do not complain any day of our life, because the good days make us happy, our moments of struggle are life experiences that strengthen us and both are necessary in life.

Joy makes us delightful, our toils make us strong, meanwhile, sufferings help us to be more human, and failures and disappointments are lessons in humility. With the Lord, we move on and we keep going.

As we celebrate today the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an expression of His deep love for man, we pray:

"Heart of Jesus, patient and most merciful; Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation; Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection; Heart of Jesus, our peace and our reconciliation; Heart of Jesus, salvation of those who trust in Thee." Amen, (from the Litany of the Sacred Heart)

+Fouad Twal Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem