

Dear friends,

On Friday March 27th I learned that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, was going to extend a plenary indulgence from Saint Peter's Square in Rome. I was interested and so I tuned in. I did not really know what to expect and figured that maybe ten or fifteen minutes would handle things. I was totally unprepared for what I encountered. In effect, I, and millions of others all around the world, had an opportunity to make a Holy Hour of Adoration with the Holy Father.

He read from the Scriptures the passage of the apostles in one of their fishing boats at night on the Sea of Galilee when a storm arose. Jesus was with them. In the boat with them. They were afraid of the power of the storm and that it might swamp their little craft. Jesus was asleep. They yelled at him to wake up—and save them. He did awake. He asked them why they were so lacking in faith and trust. He then calmed the storm and the sea returned to normal. The Pope made the point that there are similarities with our present worldwide situation with the corona virus. We are truly in the same boat, all of us. And Jesus is with us. In the boat with us. Good to remember. Necessary to remember.

The Pope was alone. A solitary figure under the canopy before a totally empty Saint Peter's Square. It was darkening twilight and it was raining. Pretty hard. Francis was this suddenly old and very solitary figure giving a homily by social media to people of all faiths and no faith, all over the world. He put his own faith on the line. Then he got up and walked from the canopy. It was not clear to me where he was going. He went to a large icon of the Blessed Virgin, Health of the Sick. He prayed for Mary to intercede with her Son, as she did during his lifetime and often in heaven since. He touched the icon at the end of his prayer.

Then he went to the other side of the entryway and prayed before the crucifix from the church of San Marcello which burned down during the 1500's but which crucifix was salvaged unharmed from the fire. A sign while the plague was killing thousands. Francis prayed and touched the corpus of the crucifix and then bowed to kiss the Body of Christ. To me, that is what was actually going on that night. This old pope was giving a kiss to the worldwide Body of Christ.

He went inside the vestibule of Saint Peter's and there was an altar with the Blessed Sacrament in a beautiful gold monstrance. The Pope sat heavily in his chair and looked at the Blessed Sacrament. And the Blessed Sacrament looked back at the Pope. Later there would be prayers of petition begging God's mercy and compassion and forgiveness. Quiet prayers. There was music from the papal choir at various times. In Latin. Beautiful Haunting. Without understanding any of the words I intuitively sensed the meaning. We were crying out in our song for the Lord to be with us as He was with the apostles in the little fishing boat.

Then the Holy Father was draped with a humeral veil and the monstrance was placed in his hands and he turned to walk back out into the darkened night, in the driving rain. Solemn. Grave. Serious. Poignant. Very real. And solitary. And then he lifted the monstrance and blessed everyone. Three times. In papal fashion. Profound. Moving. Almost breath-taking. Listen to how one man (Mike Pakaluk of The Catholic Thing) described this moment.

As the Holy Father lifted up the Blessed Sacrament in its monstrance last Friday, to impart his blessing, *Urbi et Orbi*, to the city of Rome and to the world, one of the members of my household got down on her knees in the living room before the big TV. She bowed her head, to receive the blessing. And then so did everyone else, following her lead. By the time the blessing was over, all of us were in tears, struck by the profundity of what we had just witnessed. Perhaps you too were deeply moved.

I certainly was. I will never forget that moment. Something new had just transpired. New. I mean really new. New in all the history of the world. New as the death of Jesus of Nazareth was new. In that moment the entire face of the earth was being renewed and blessed with the presence of Jesus Christ. (As I just typed that sentence the Holy Spirit sent a wonderful anointing through my body.) There was a uniting and a renewing of the face of the earth begun in that moment. And we were alive and many saw it happen before their eyes. This the moment of Pope Francis pontificate that will be remembered. Not all the other stuff.

My friends. Pay attention. There is something going on now and we will not simply be returning to what was. No. We are to face into the future and we are to put Christ first. The rest will follow. The day has come for us. The Day of the Lord. Much like his hour did for Jesus.

Peace, Msgr. McHenry