

DAILY COMPASS ANNUAL CELEBRATION

## To follow Jesus to the cross, perseverance is the way to salvation

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*We publish below the meditation prepared and read by Monsignor Nicola Bux, theologian and professor of Oriental liturgy, at the Daily Compass Day held on Saturday 28 September in Palazzolo sull'Oglio (Brescia), at the Shalom Community, with the title 'Persevering in the faith'.*

### **1. Battles on the outside, fears on the inside**

Pope St Gregory the Great writes: 'Holy men, even if tormented by trials, know how to endure those who attack them and, at the same time, stand up to those who want to drag them into error. Against those persons they raise the shield of patience, against them they wield the weapons of truth. They thus combine the two methods of struggle by resorting to the truly unsurpassable art of fortitude. Internally they straighten out the distortions of sound doctrine with enlightened teaching, externally they know how to sustain every persecution. They correct by teaching, they defeat by endurance. With patience they feel stronger against their enemies, with charity they are better able to heal souls wounded by evil. They resist them so that they do not cause others to deviate as well. They follow them with fear and concern lest they abandon the path of righteousness altogether. We see the soldier in God's camps who fights against both evils: 'Battles outside, fears within' (2 Cor.7:5)'.

**'But he who perseveres to the end, he will be saved'** (Mk 13:13). Persevere, a verb that goes with faithfulness, trust, patience, above all persecution and martyrdom.

**Jesus is the persecuted par excellence, from birth to death;** the final phase of that persecution is bloody and full of suffering, so much so as to be defined as 'passion'. In fact, St Peter, in the First Epistle, says that he suffered for us, so that we might follow in his footsteps (cf. 2:21). The passion of Jesus, moreover, is a gift given to every person; as St Paul admirably states in the Epistle to the Galatians 2:20: 'He gave himself for me. Jesus' passion is for me, for my life, for my salvation; Jesus' passion is a grace and an example, it is the 'method' for living life.

Therefore, the passion is the method to understand how to be members of the body of Christ that is the Church; therefore we must remember that we cannot be treated differently from what was reserved for Jesus, who prophesied: 'If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you' (Jn 15:20).

**One must persevere to the end.** The climax of the tribulation seems to be the appearance of false messiahs and prophets, whom Jesus warns against (cf. Mt 24:23f; Mk 13:21f; Lk 21:23f). Beyond the historical moment in which this prophecy was

realised, namely the empire of Caligula and Nero, the warning aims to alert Christians to the periodic reappearance of Antichrists. How can one resist such attempts at the recurrent mystification of Christ? It is the very constitution of the apostolic college that acts as the first defence; but the point of greatest resistance is constituted by the conferring of the pastoral commission on Peter, combined with the clear prediction of his martyrdom (cf. Jn 21:18) to which Jesus had alluded in John (13:36). The task he is to take on 'more than these' will be the object of persecution. The primacy, therefore, receives a martyrological\* structure, as Jesus had already indirectly foreshadowed in his answer to the mother of the sons of Zebedee about the place of honour next to him. The persecutions, beginning with those of the Sanhedrin and Nero, had Peter, the prince of the apostles, as their primary target. But after the death of the two James, John too 'drank the same cup' as Jesus himself had promised (cf. Mk 10:39).

**So persecution is the fate of the disciples:** Jesus' identity cannot be easily accepted by the world, because if it were, it would not constitute novelty and the world would receive nothing more than what it already has. The contrast, on the other hand, shows that the reality of Jesus is quite different from that of the world. Therefore, the disciples' mission also carries within it this contrast.

**Jesus then warns precisely against those** who, experts in religion and the law, believe they hold the key to interpretation and do not allow others to enter; thus they kill the prophets, true bearers of the renewing Spirit. When they are alive, they are vituperated and sent to death: later, monuments are erected in their memory (cf. Lk 11:47-53). It is striking that the persecution starts right from within the community (cf. Mt 10:21)! Therefore, following Jesus means following Him in pain, taking up the cross and losing one's life (cf. Mt 10,38f; 16,24-28; Mk 8,34-35; 9,1; Lk 9,23-27; 14,27; 17,33; Jn 12,25). This was not easy for the disciples to understand, indeed it was a source of disturbance; hence Jesus reiterated the prophecy of the passion (cf. Mt 17:22f; Mk 9:30-32; Lk 9:43b-45).

**Persecution must be accepted for the sake of the gospel.** Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved. The attitude to withstand persecution, therefore, is perseverance, which in the Christian mission, allows one not to win, but to resist evil. In the end, Christ's disciples are not called to achieve victories on this earth, but to oppose the anti-Christian deadly mentality, which extinguishes nascent life with abortion and killing life with euthanasia: because the world, seemingly indifferent, opposes Christ. Therefore the Christian is called to resist with his testimony, which will enable him to win in the end: because the world's ways of thinking pass away, like fashions, but the Word of God

remains for ever.

**St Paul has admirably drawn the lines** of a 'theology of persecution', particularly when he states in the First Letter to the Corinthians: 'Insulted, we bless; persecuted, we endure; slandered, we comfort; we have become like the trash of the world, the refuse of all: to this day' (4:12-13). Whether bloody or not, persecution constitutes the ordinary statute of the Church\*. The Martyrology is therefore the necessary vademecum of the Christian. From the first advent of Christ until his return, the supreme beatitude remains persecution (Mt 5:11-12).

## **2. The current state of the Church and its causes**

A significant interview with Msgr. Sergio Pagano in the newspaper 'Corriere della Sera' of 13 July 2024, crowning twenty-seven years as Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Archive. Asked whether he sees a decadence or a rebirth in today's Church, Pagano replied: ' Sadly, after Vatican Council II there was a general disbandment: too many expectations. Disorder was created in the discipline, in the seminaries and in the pontifical universities. There was a deepening crisis in doctrine. And in this climate of uncertainty, conspicuous confusion has prevailed. I register the disorientation of the faithful and a certain decadence of theological thinking. Pastoral work itself is reduced to charity for charity's sake, without a vertical, faith-based inspiration'.

**The cause? With St Augustine, we can say that 'pastors shepherd themselves'**, looking after their own interests and not the salvation of souls. Today, the vast majority of the baptised, simple faithful, priests, bishops, live unknowingly immersed in heresy (which means a choice between truth to be believed or between its parts), and few are able to distinguish between the truth and error that has penetrated the Church. When society was still Catholic, the *sensus fidei* was developed and it was easy to discern the heresy of a priest, a bishop or even a Pope. Today, the vast majority of Catholics, including quite a few bishops, take all the Pope's words and deeds at face value, nor do they think that he may have lost the faith or that he persists in error. On the other hand, there are those who have decided that Bergoglio is not Pope, because he does not have the grace of state. But any minister of the Church who sins in word and deed does not lose his ministry. The Pope said on a television show that hell is empty, but quickly added that it was his opinion. Until he makes a solemn dogmatic declaration that is false, he is not deprived of the Petrine ministry. The Cardinals' *Dubia* are the right method to object to the Pope, whom we respect for his role, but to whom we object when he goes against Revelation.

**Joseph Ratzinger wrote seventy years ago:** 'The image of the modern Church is essentially characterised by the fact that it has become and is becoming more and more a Church of pagans in a completely new way: no longer, as once was the case, a Church of pagans who have become Christians, but rather a Church of pagans, who still call themselves Christians but have in fact long since become pagans. Paganism resides today in the Church itself and this is precisely the characteristic of the Church of our days as well as of the new paganism: it is a paganism in the Church and a Church in whose heart paganism dwells'.

**Abbé Claude Barthe believes** that, going back in time, what some, such as Michel de Certeau (1925-1986- heterodox Jesuit, French linguist and historian, favourite author of Pope Francis), diagnosed in the 1970s seems to be coming true: a rift, one might say a schism, occurred after Vatican II, dividing the Church into two currents, both rather composite but clearly identifiable: the first, for whom the Council at least had to be stemmed, the other for whom it was nothing more than a starting point.

**Shortly after his election,** in his well-known address to the Curia on 22 December 2005, Benedict XVI distinguished between two interpretations of the Council reform, 'the hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture', which he considered nefarious, and 'the hermeneutics of reform or renewal in the continuity of the one subject Church that the Lord has given us', which he made his own, destined, he said, to prevent 'a rupture between the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Church'.

**It is a certainty of faith that the Church does not change,** it grows over time, it develops, always remaining the same people on the way. Everyone knows Saint Vincent of Lerins: quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditur: this is Catholic. Since the post-Council, it is precisely the idea of the Church that has been the pivot of the Catholic crisis: there is a tendency to separate it from the people of God and replace it with other worldly entities, when the problems of justice and peace have to be addressed; through the misunderstood inter-religious dialogue, there is a desire to make it a UN of religions, not a banner raised among nations.

**In the speech in question, Pope Benedict points to a paradox:** we have come to theorise and practice the rupture between pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Church. In this way, the nature of the Council as such has been 'fundamentally misunderstood. In this way it is seen as a kind of constituent, which eliminates an old constitution and creates a new one. But the Constituent Assembly needs a principal and then a confirmation by the principal, i.e. the people to whom the Constituent Assembly is to

serve. The fathers did not have such a mandate and no one had ever given it to them; no one could give it to them, because the essential constitution of the Church comes from the Lord and has been given to us so that we can attain eternal life and from this perspective, we are also able to illuminate life in time and time itself'. Thus, discontinuity goes against the dynamic fidelity that characterises Tradition. This passage is decisive to understand the utopia of those who reject the Council, as of those who dream of the synodal Church.

**Benedict XVI, in his address to the Curia**, attributes to John XXIII and Paul VI, the idea of the Council as a 'reform in the continuity of the single subject Church', because they affirmed in the Opening and Closing Allocutions, that the Church: 'wants to transmit pure and integral doctrine, without attenuation or misrepresentation'; and that the faithful respect and deepening of the 'certain and immutable' doctrine must not ignore contemporary demands, but without misrepresenting its meaning and scope.

**In his address, Pope Benedict also mentions the other issue:** the relationship between the Church and her faith, on the one hand, and man and the world of today - i.e. the modern age - on the other, for which the discontinuity might seem convincing, were it not for the fact that the modern age has sought to eliminate God from mankind's horizon. However, certain positive developments following the phase of opposition between the Church and the modern age - such as a type of modern state, secular but not value-neutral - had led, especially after the Second World War, to reciprocal openings; not to mention the contribution of Catholic social doctrine and the opening of the natural sciences to God. Therefore, three questions stood before the Council and awaited answers: the relationship between faith and the modern sciences, the relationship between the Church and the modern state, especially as regards behaviour towards religions; the problem of religious tolerance, which led to a redefinition of the relationship between the Christian faith and the religions of the world, and within it that between the Church and the faith of Israel. On all this we have Professor Stefano Fontana as a very clear teacher.

**Benedict does not hide the fact that 'openness to the world'** has not turned everything into pure harmony - for some, putting an end even to the sacred - underestimating the tensions and contradictions, as well as the fragility of human nature that constitutes the permanent threat to man's path. Isn't there still so much of the world that shuns the Gospel and, instead, needs to be reached by it? We realised this at the opening of the Olympics. In our day, then, the dangers have increased, especially because of the power of technology, which has become almost a new idol. So

should the Church dissolve into the religions of the world, old and new? Should conversion and forgiveness of sins no longer be preached? It has come to be postulated that religions are parallel ways of salvation, as if Christ is no longer the only Saviour.

**In conclusion, Pope Benedict was convinced** that ‘the step taken by the Council towards the modern age, which was very inaccurately presented as “openness to the world”, ultimately belongs to the perennial problem of the relationship between faith and reason, which always reappears in new forms’. St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort recalled that the Church has always united the most compassionate charity and the firmest doctrinal intransigence, in the ardour of the same love, which is zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The Church knows that it cannot do good without fighting evil, that it cannot evangelise without fighting heresy. This is why apologetic training is important, as the *Monthly Bussola Magazine* is trying to do. Those who do not know how to defend the faith, cannot spread it.

**Mercy and doctrine - by doctrine Revelation is meant - can only exist together.**

The Church - it has been said - is intransigent in principle, because it believes; it is tolerant in practice, because it loves. By contrast, the Church's enemies are tolerant in principle, because they do not believe, and intransigent in practice, because they do not love.

**As we know, the conclave of 2013 wanted to try the other option**, the opposite Vatican II hermeneutic, to which Jorge Bergoglio subscribed. The new pope, who in an address to the Jesuit magazines in 2022 said he was fighting against ‘restorationism’, which wants to ‘gag’ the Council, and against ‘traditionalism’, which wants to empty it, has therefore committed himself to ‘breaking down walls’, according to his preferred expression:

- that of *Humanae vitae* and the set of texts that followed this encyclical, which had preserved conjugal morality from the liberalisation that Vatican II had subjected ecclesiology to. *Amoris laetitia* declared in 2016 that people living in public adultery could continue to do so without committing a grave sin (AL 301).

- that of *Summorum Pontificum*, which had recognised a right to that heritage of the Church which is the ancient liturgy with its catechesis and its clerics. Traditionis Custodes and Desiderio desideravi, in 2021, blocked this attempted ‘return’: the new liturgical books are the only expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite (TC, Art. 1).

**With the Bergoglio option**, the ecclesiastical institution has continued to sink and the

mission to fade away. Not to mention the theme of intrusive, confusing and despotic governance (despite the watchword of synodality) on which critics are pronouncing. Francis had so far been careful not to go beyond the Council, at the risk of blowing up some institutional structure: for example, despite all the declarations against clericalism, he has never really questioned priestly celibacy or opened the priesthood to women. With the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Brotherhood, the Encyclical *Brothers All* and, above all, the Speech on the recent trip to Singapore, he seemed to want to go beyond the Council, if one only consults *Dignitatis Humanae* 1, which states that the true religion exists in the Catholic Church.

### **3. What can happen now**

It will be difficult for the future conclave not to raise a strong demand for a change of course, if indeed the Church today finds itself in this 'conspicuous confusion'. Inevitably - Barthe observes - there will have to be a doctrinal and spiritual re-centring accentuated in relation to the rupture that has occurred. Over a longer or shorter period of time, as has happened in the history of the Church *semper reformanda*, this can only occur as a return to the Gospel roots. It will be necessary, to turn the Leopard formula upside down, for nothing to change (dogma, morals) in order for everything to change (the whole of the Church's concrete life). This work will need reforming men, holy and strong men of the Church, with a theological project, and therefore a solid magisterial and spiritual one, guided by divine Providence. Jesus founded the Holy Church and makes it grow in the midst of tribulations within, and externally with the trials and martyrdom of the faithful. Although the powers of the world oppress and fight against it, they can never prevail.

**In the short and medium term**, one can envisage a transitional period in which an ecclesiastical personality, formed on the Council model but who does not want to see Catholicism perish, will reluctantly, or perhaps willingly, grant full freedom to all living forces - as John Paul II and Benedict XVI did - those that produce fruits of transmitting the faith from generation to generation, of vocations and mission. Then, by reason of the promises of Christ, a true reform of the Church will begin to take place.

**Benedict XVI was interested in the faith and how to weld the Council** to the entire history of the Church, - which Francis does not seem to be interested in - otherwise the political vision will prevail.



**In my humble opinion, Benedict XVI has taught** perhaps the healthiest principle of Catholicism: not to transport the past en bloc into the present, but to preserve and hand down only its best (in a moral, ideal, spiritual sense) and abandon the rest, without regret, to its ephemeral destiny. Christianity affirmed that time is not repetition (as most ancient conceptions claimed), but novelty. In short, it is the relationship between nova et vetera established by Jesus, between tradition and innovation. This is Catholic.

**Here then is his proposal, made in his speech in Subiaco,** on 1 April 2005: 'What we need above all at this moment in history are men who, through an enlightened and lived faith, make God credible in this world. The negative witness of Christians who spoke of God and lived against Him, darkened the image of God and opened the door to unbelief. We need men who keep their gaze straight at God, learning true humanity from there. We need men whose intellect is illuminated by the light of God and to whom God opens their hearts, so that their intellect can speak to the intellect of others and their hearts can open the hearts of others. Only through men who are touched by God can God return to men'.

**Benedict's thought and 'reform' are like a karst river,** the signs of which rise to the surface: the spread of the Vetus Ordo liturgy and influence on the Novus Ordo where it is well celebrated, Communion in the mouth, priestly and religious vocations anchored in the supernatural: all this contributes to the formation of the conscience (it corresponds to the 'heart', in the Holy Scriptures): thus the rebirth of the sacred begins in the hearts. Participation in the sacred liturgy, as long as it reflects the Church's authentic ritual order, as Pope Benedict has taught, slowly and radically shapes our conscience in a pure and luminous way. The Church must form the conscience of man, to stop and prevent the immoral drift of generations of young people.

#### **4. What we must do**

Benedict XVI posed the question and gave the answer: 'What must we do? Should we create another Church so that things are put right? This experiment has already been done and failed.

**We must 'abide' in Jesus Christ** in order to be one with Him and each other, and seek unity with those in the Church who live the faith as judgement (Jn 9:39). We must abide in the unity of the whole, that is, in the Catholic Church. We must be a movement of resistance to the 'dictatorship of relativism' through the doctrinal and moral formation

of young people, especially those with a priestly or religious vocation. One must resist, suffer, as Christ did in the Passion. Commenting on Chesterton, Fr Giussani said: 'We must dissent, oppose, rightly resist despotic forms, in essence a non-ecclesial life in the Church. However, we must not make the mistake of placing ourselves outside it, psychologically and methodologically. The great teaching of Christ on the cross is that by dying inside the Church, one can change things, not outside it.'

**We must know how to distinguish Church and Churchmen.**

The Apostle writes to his co-worker Timothy: *Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi.* 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' (2 Timothy 4:7). We must be faithful! How can we keep the faith? St Peter writes: 'Adore the Lord, Christ, in your hearts, always ready to answer with gentleness, respect and a good conscience to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you' (1 Pet 3:15). St Gregory of Nyssa observes: 'this was the attitude of all those whom the tyrants forced to deny the faith: they showed that they did not fear physical sufferings and the sentence of death; these sufferings they would not have faced if they had not had clear proof of the presence of God within themselves'. The Christian must do mission by word and personal witness, but when 'the word has not converted,' assures Karol Wojtyła, 'the blood will convert'.

**If one reads the life of St Benedict carefully,** one deduces that only when one is truly ready to lose everything, can one receive, and what one receives is not always what one wants. By combining our sufferings with those of the first disciples, whose hopes in a worldly triumph were all but crushed, we can learn to place our trust not in men, but in God. Only he can resurrect the Church, but perhaps only once we accept that we have lost everything.

**The remedy for the ecclesial crisis is the Holy Mother of God, Mary:** Tradition teaches this, as Ratzinger states in 'Report on Faith',- for six reasons: 1. Mary guarantees a view of faith on the divinity of Jesus, linked as she is to the highest mystery of the incarnation of the Word; 2. The four Marian dogmas of Divine Maternity, Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, and Assumption into Heaven in body and soul, express the integration of Scripture and Tradition that is expressed in the liturgy, in the *sensus fidei* of the faithful, and in theological reflection guided by the Magisterium; 3. Mary holds together the ancient and new people of God, Israel and Christianity. In her we can live the whole of Scripture; 4. Mary guarantees to faith the coexistence of the indispensable 'reason' with the equally indispensable 'reasons of the heart', as Pascal would say. 5. By looking to Mary, the Church rediscovers her face as a Mother, she

cannot degenerate into an organisation at the service of human interests; thus, she is an antidote to the abstractionism of faith; 6. Mary is a light to get out of the crisis of women caused by virginity ignored or despised, and maternity feared and marginalised.

**Thanks to her, to her assent**, the eternal Word became flesh, that is, was able to enter human history. Every man, in a certain sense, is called to offer his own flesh to God in order to enter the hearts of men, like the Virgin Mary. But one must be a virgin, that is, not defiled, not a succubus of worldly mentality. Only in this way can one collaborate in the redemption of the world, following Our Lady's example.

**In view of what has just been described** and in order to secure the path of perseverance in the faith, allow me to resort to Joseph Ratzinger's commentary on Fatima: "I would like at the end to take up another key word from the "secret" that has become justly famous: "My immaculate heart will triumph". What does it mean? The heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God is stronger than guns and weapons of all kinds. Mary's fiat, the word of her heart, changed the history of the world, because she brought into this world, the Saviour - because thanks to this 'yes' God could become a man in our space, and such now remains forever. The evil one has power in this world, we see it and experience it again and again; he has power because our freedom continually allows itself to be turned away from God. But since God himself has a human heart and has thus turned man's freedom towards good, towards God, freedom for evil no longer has the last word. Since then, the word applies: 'You will have tribulation in the world, but have confidence: I have overcome the world' (Jn 16:33). The message of Fatima invites us to rely on this promise'.