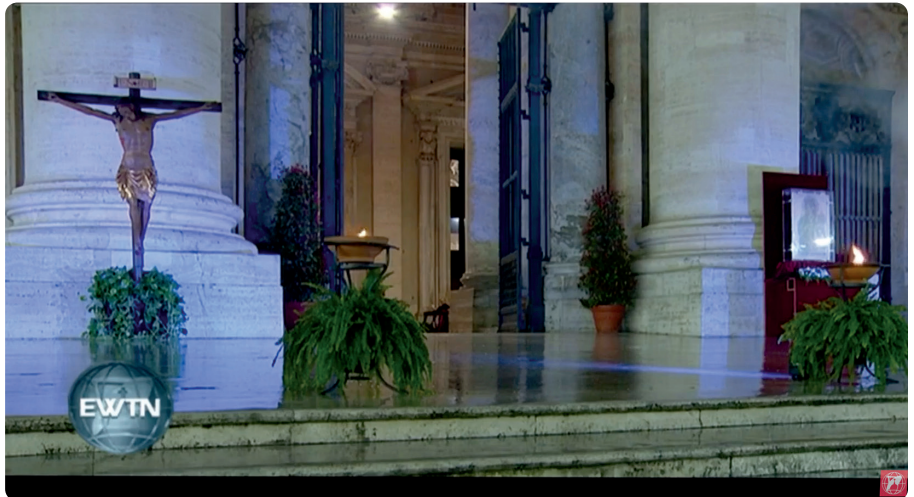


## Urbi et Orbi blessing and Pope Francis Message on (Lk 8/22-25)

Vatican City, Mar 27, 2020, 6 pm. On Friday, before an empty and rain-covered St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis held Eucharistic adoration and gave an extraordinary Urbi et Orbi blessing, praying for the world during the coronavirus pandemic which has killed more than 25,000 people.

The holy hour March 27 included a reading from the Gospel and a meditation by Pope Francis, who spoke about faith and trust in God during a time when people fear for their lives, as did the disciples when their boat was caught in a violent storm. (Lk 8/22-25) "We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love," Francis said. Embracing Christ's cross, he said, "means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time." "Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope," the pope stated.



Pope Francis held Eucharistic adoration on an altar set up under the portico in front of St. Peter's Basilica. Also present nearby was a miraculous crucifix which the pope visited March 15 to pray for an end to the coronavirus pandemic. The crucifix, which usually hangs in San Marcello al Corso, was venerated as miraculous by Romans after it was the only religious image to survive unscathed from a fire that completely gutted the church on May 23, 1519.

An image of the Byzantine icon of Mary as Salus Populi Romani, was also brought to the square for veneration during the prayer. In his meditation, Pope Francis entrusted everyone to the Lord through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "from this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world." "Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts," he prayed. "You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm." "Tell us again: 'Do not be afraid' (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, 'cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us.'"

God's call to be converted resounds in our hearts this Lent, he said. This is a time, he said, "to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives





back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.” In this moment, “how many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons,” Francis said. He noted that in the Gospel, (Lk8/22-25) the disciples are afraid of the storm, but Christ sleeps in the boat. The disciples lacked faith not because they stopped believing in Christ, but because they think he does not care about what happens to them.

“Do you not care about me?’ It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement,” Francis said. The storm, he said, “exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities.” “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’ Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us.”



The extraordinary Urbi et Orbi also included the opportunity for Catholics to receive a plenary indulgence by joining via the media. Pope Francis said during the hour of prayer that part of faith is realizing we are in need of salvation, that we are not self-sufficient. “We need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars,” he said. “Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our homes and lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck.” At the conclusion of the prayer, Pope Francis gave an extraordinary Urbi et Orbi blessing, and gave benediction with the Blessed Sacrament while the bells of the basilica rang.

*Continue to pray for one another, and keep your families at the feet of Jesus*  
Fr. Kumar Udagandla