

That your own faith may not fail

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

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**It's good to go with Jesus!
It's good to walk with Jesus!
The message of Jesus is
good...
It's good to go out of
ourselves,
to go to the periphery of
the world and of existence,
to bring Jesus!**

Pope Francis
On Palm Sunday



Pope Francis. Holy Thursday

At the Last Supper Jesus tells Peter, "*I have prayed that your own faith may not fail*" (Lk. 22: 32). This demonstration of affection for Peter, his friend, is dramatic. Jesus calls on the strength of the Father so that Peter might withstand the test of Easter. The goal of Peter's faith, for which Jesus prays, is service, "*once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.*" We too believe in order to serve. Faith sustains charity; faith makes it possible for charity to remain steadfast. The Servant says, "*The Lord God is my help... I did not refuse, I did not turn away.*" (Is. 50: 7, 5) With faith in the love of God, love for our brothers and sisters can withstand the test.

We hear Jesus' prayer for Peter during the liturgical season of Easter, which we are celebrating, and it brings to mind the Petrine ministry in the Church taken up recently by Pope Francis. With his personal simplicity, the clarity of his words and the humility of his gestures, the beginning of Francis' ministry as Bishop of Rome has stirred a sense of enthusiasm and joy in many people. I believe that in everyone's heart, believers or not, there dwells a longing for love without complications, for the Gospel without gloss, for communion without pretense. God always loves us. Let us help one another. Let us do no harm to one another. Let us go to the poor and those who suffer. Let us live simply. Let us rejoice in Jesus...How can we not respond to such a message? If it were even possible to live that and only that...Isn't that the desire we express in our religious profession?

One of the constants in Francis' message these days is the invitation to the Church to go out of itself to the periphery. If we just think of ourselves, we become sick and no self-help therapy will heal us of this illness. Our General Chapter said, "*We want to go to the margins to where the love of Christ-the Good Shepherd-is pushing us.*" (Mission 15) Our heart burns when we hear the message of love and simplicity; however we become perplexed when we look for concrete ways of moving to the margins and serving our brothers and sisters. What do we have to do? Will we be able to maintain communion and love for one another as we search for answers to these practical questions?

This "success" of the beginning of Francis' ministry, which I watch with joy and hope, also makes me think of how fragile and superficial a person's public image is. A few kindly gestures and some images well caught by the media can be enough to arouse

widespread enthusiasm. In the same way, some misstep or a few lines taken out of context and put all over the media can cause just as widespread condemnation and disdain. Between Palm Sunday (when the people acclaim Jesus) and Good Friday (when they call for his crucifixion) there were hardly four days. Everything is vain and passing, if not rooted in faith.

Jesus' prayer for Peter (*I have prayed that your own faith may not fail*) reveals a devastating possibility: our faith can fail. The faith that unites us to Jesus, which gives steadfastness to our charity and makes us humble and poor, that same faith can decrease. And it can even happen without our being aware, caught up as we are in so many different things.

In a recent letter to the brothers of his province, a provincial wrote, *"Doesn't it seem that the humility that brings us to faith can also be the prescription for many of our ills? My hectic life as provincial is dedicated to concern and work for you my brothers. That's the reason you elected me. OK, to be honest I'd have to say that the main problems I have to face in myself first and then in you are the lack of humility and the lack of faith. Possibly I'm being overly simplistic, but I don't think I'm totally off base."*

I think that what this brother provincial is saying can be applied to all of us in the congregation. In this time of Easter, in this year dedicated to the faith, in these months when we are preparing for the beatification of our martyrs, let us ask the Lord that he pray also for us that our faith not fail so that we might serve our brothers and sisters better and go forward in joy.