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Jubilee audience: take pity on those who suffer

Vatican City, 14 May 2016 – Pope Francis dedicated this Saturday's jubilee audience to the theme of pity with those who suffer. More than fifteen thousand people listened to the Holy Father's catechesis in St. Peter's Square despite the heavy rain, and Pope Francis thanked them and invited them to greet the sick who, on account of the poor weather, were gathered in the Paul VI Hall to watch the audience on the maxi screens installed there. "I propose that we welcome them with an applause", he said "even if it is difficult to applaud with an umbrella in your hand!".

"Among the many aspects of mercy, there is one which consists of feeling pity for those who are in need of love", he explained. "Pity is a concept present in the Greek-Roman world, where however it indicated ... above all the devotion due to the gods, then respect for children for their parents and in particular the elders. Today, however, we must be careful not to identify pity with pietism, which is quite widespread and is merely a superficial emotion that offends the dignity of the other. In the same way, pity must not be confused with the compassion we may feel for animals who live with us; at times one may indeed feel this sentiment towards animals yet remain indifferent to the suffering of our brothers."

The pity of which we speak is "a manifestation of God's mercy. It is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that the Lord offers to His disciples to make them docile and obedient to divine inspiration. Many times in the Gospels we encounter the spontaneous cry to Jesus of the sick, the possessed, the poor and the afflicted: 'Have mercy on me'. Jesus responds to them all with a gaze of mercy and the comfort of His presence. In such invocations of help and requests for pity, each person also expresses his or her faith in Jesus, calling him 'Teacher', 'Son of David' and 'Lord'. They intuited that in Him there was something extraordinary, that was able to help them to emerge from the sad situation in which they found themselves. They perceived in Him the love of God Himself. And even though the crowd jostled around Him, Jesus was aware of these invocations of mercy and took pity, especially when He saw those who suffered and were wounded in their dignity, as in the case of the bleeding woman. He calls upon them to trust in Him and in His Word. For Jesus, to feel pity was equivalent to sharing the sadness of those He met, but at the same time of working in first person to transform it into joy."

"We too are called to cultivate in ourselves attitudes of pity in relation to many situations of life, shaking off the indifference that prevents us from acknowledging the needs of the brothers who surround us and freeing us from the slavery of material well-being", emphasised the Pope at the end of his catechesis. "Let us look to the

example of the Virgin Mary, who cares for each one of her sons and is for us, as believers, the icon of pity. Dante Alighieri expresses this in the prayer to Our Lady at the end of Paradise: 'In thee compassion is, in thee is pity ... in thee unites whate'er of goodness is in any creature.'
