



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Holy Father's appeal

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 a.m. in St. Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope focused on the theme "Hope founded on the Word" (cf. Romans 15: 1-2, 4-5).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then invited those present to live the event of 23 and 24 March, "24 Hours for the Lord", to rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

For some weeks now the Apostle Paul has been helping us to understand better what Christian hope consists of. And we have said that it was not optimism, that it was something else. And the Apostle helps us to

understand this. Today he does so by aligning two attitudes that are more important than ever for our life and for our experience of faith: endurance and encouragement (vv. 4.5). In the passage from the Letter to the Romans that we have just heard, they are mentioned twice: first with reference to the Scriptures and then to God Himself. What is their deepest and truest meaning? And how do they shed light on the reality of hope? These two attitudes: endurance and encouragement.

We may define endurance also as patience: it is the capacity to sustain, to carry on our shoulders, to remain faithful, even when the burden seems to become too great and unbearable, and when we are tempted to judge negatively and abandon everything and everyone. Encouragement, instead, is the grace of knowing how to perceive and to show in every situation, even in those most marked by disappointment and suffering, the presence of God's compassionate action. Now, Saint Paul reminds us that endurance and encouragement are transmitted to us in a special way in the Scriptures (v. 4), that is, the Bible. Indeed, the Word of God, first of all, leads us to turn our gaze to Jesus, to know Him better and to conform to Him, to increasingly resemble Him. Secondly, the Word reveals to us that the Lord is truly the "God of endurance and encouragement" (v. 5), Who always remains faithful in His love for us; that is, He endures in His love with us, and He never tires of loving us! He endures, He always loves us! And He takes care of us, tending to our wounds with the caress of His goodness and His mercy, that is, He consoles us. He never tires of encouraging us either.

From this perspective we can also understand the Apostle's initial affirmation: "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (v. 1). This expression, "we who are strong", may seem presumptuous, but in the logic of the Gospel we know that it is not so; or rather, that it is precisely the opposite, because our strength does not come from us, but from the Lord. He who experiences in his own life the faithful love of God and His encouragement is able, or rather, compelled stay close to his weaker brothers and to take on their frailty. If we stay close to the Lord, we will have the strength to be close to the weakest, those most in need, and to encourage and give strength to them. This is what it means. We can do this without complacency, instead simply aware of being a "channel" that transmits the gifts of the Lord; and in this one can truly become a "sower" of hope. This is what the Lord asks of us, with that strength and that capacity to console and to be sowers of hope. And nowadays we need to sow hope, but it is not easy...

The fruit of this style of life is not a community in whom some belong to an "A-list" made up of the strong, and others a "B-list", consisting of the weak. The fruit is, instead, as Saint Paul says, to "live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus" (v. 5). The Word of God nurtures a hope that translates in a concrete way into sharing, into mutual service. Because even those who are "strong" sooner or later find themselves experiencing fragility and being in need of the comfort of others; and vice versa, in weakness one can always offer a smile or a hand to a brother in difficulty. And it is a community that thereby "with one voice [glorifies] the God and Father" (cf. v.6). But all this is possible if we place Christ and His Word at the centre, because He is the strong one, it is He Who gives us strength, Who gives us patience, Who gives us hope, Who gives us encouragement. He is the "strong brother" Who takes care of each one of us: indeed, we all need to be lifted onto the shoulders of the Good Shepherd and to feel wrapped in His tender and thoughtful gaze.

Dear friends, we are never able to thank God enough for the gift of His Word, that He makes present in the Scriptures. It is there that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself as the "God of endurance and encouragement". And it is there that we become aware of how our hope is founded not on our abilities and our strengths, but on God's support and on the fidelity of His love, that is, on God's strength and consolation.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am glad to welcome French-speaking pilgrims, especially those responsible for Catholic teaching in the diocese of Pontoise, with Bishop Stanislas Lalanne, the faithful from Belgium and France, and the community of Congo-Brazzaville in Italy. I invite you to give thanks to God for the gift of His Word, to become ever more aware that

our hope is based on the fidelity of His love. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from England, Denmark, Norway and the United States of America. May this Lent be a time of grace-filled time of spiritual renewal, filled with the Lord's blessings of joy and peace.

I also offer a special welcome to the participants in the "Watershed" Conference on replenishing water values for a thirsty world", co-hosted by the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Argentine Chapter of the Club of Rome. Today is World Water Day, instituted twenty-five years ago by the United Nations, while yesterday was the International Day of Forests. I am happy that this meeting is taking place, for it represents yet another stage in the joint commitment of various institutions to raising consciousness about the need to protect water as a treasure belonging to everyone, mindful too of its cultural and religious significance. I especially encourage your efforts in the area of education, through programmes directed to children and young people. Thank you for all that you do and may God bless you!

German

I address a cordial greeting to all German-speaking pilgrims. A few days ago we celebrated the Solemnity of St. Joseph, who is a model of hope and perseverance. How many difficulties he overcame, trusting in God! In this way he transmitted to the Holy Family the consolation of the promises of the Lord. By his intercession, may God grant us the gift of solidarity and His blessing.

Spanish

I cordially greet the Spanish-speaking pilgrims, particularly those from Spain and Latin America. Let us thank the Lord for the gift of His Word and let us not forget that our hope depends not on our abilities but on God's help and the fidelity of His love. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I greet all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims from Brazil and Portugal. Dear friends, we are called to be always available to others, with a smile or a helping hand to those in need, thus becoming true sowers of hope. God bless you all!

Arabic

I address a warm greeting to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East. Endurance becomes impossible if it is not based on hope, and encouragement becomes deceit if it is not founded on trust in the sure and near presence of the Lord. Endurance and encouragement are impossible if we do not have Christ at the centre of our life, our existence and our hope. May the Lord bless you and protect

you from the evil one!

Polish

I welcome the Polish pilgrims. Lent calls us to conversion and to penance: fasting, prayer and almsgiving are indicated as means of transformation. It encourages us to examine our conscience with the humble admission of guilt and the confession of sins. "Learn - in the words of Saint John Paul II - to call white white, and black black, and evil evil, and good good. Learn to call sin sin, and not to call it liberation and progress" (to university students, 26 March 1981). Filled with trust in the power of the Word of God, we open our hearts to the gift of His mercy and His forgiveness. Jesus Christ be praised.

Italian

Dear Italian-speaking pilgrims, welcome! I greet the participants in the meeting for directors of *Migrantes* and encourage them to continue in their commitment to the reception of and hospitality towards migrants and refugees, promoting their integration, and taking into account the rights and reciprocal duties for those who welcome and those who are welcomed.

I greet the boys and girls with Down syndrome from the diocese of Ascoli Piceno, and workers of the Italian Seafront Union, the *Fruit imprese* Group and Accenture Services.

A special greeting goes to the young, the sick and newly-weds. Next Saturday we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Mary. Dear young people, know how to listen to the will of God like Mary; dear sick people, do not be discouraged in the most difficult moments, aware that the Lord does not give a cross too hard to bear; and you, dear newly-weds, build your married life on the solid rock of the Word of God.

Holy Father's appeal

I invite all communities to live with faithful the events of 23 and 24 March, to rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation: "24 Hours for the Lord". I hope that this year too, the special moment of grace that is the Lenten journey may be lived in many churches, to experience the joyful encounter with the mercy of the Father, Who welcomes and forgives all.
