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## General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Appeal of the Holy Father

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall, 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 "*Divine Forgiveness: motor of hope*" – "*Who is this, who even forgives sins?*" (Lk. 7: 49).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

## Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have heard the reaction of the companions of Simon the Pharisee: "*Who is this, who even forgives sins?*" (Lk 7: 49). Jesus has just performed a scandalous gesture. A woman of the city, known to all as a sinner, entered Simon's house, bowed down at Jesus' feet, and anointed His feet with perfumed oil. All those who were there

are the table murmured: if Jesus is a prophet, He should not accept gestures of this type from a woman such as her. Those poor women, who served only to be seen in secret, even by the heads, or to be stoned. According to the mentality of the time, between the saint and the sinner, the pure and the impure, the separation should have been clear.

But Jesus' attitude is different. Since the beginning of His ministry in Galilee, He approached the lepers, the possessed, all the sick and the marginalized. Behaviour of this type was not at all usual, and indeed this sympathy of Jesus for the excluded, the "untouchables", will be one of the things that most disturb His peers. Where there is a person who suffers, Jesus takes him on board, and that suffering becomes His. Jesus does not preach that the condition of suffering must be borne with heroism, in the way of the stoic philosophers. Jesus shares human pain, and when He encounters it, there flows from within Him that attitude that characterizes Christianity: mercy. Jesus, faced with human pain, feels mercy; Jesus' heart is merciful. Jesus feels compassion. Literally: Jesus feels a tremor within. How often in the Gospels we encounter reactions of this type! Jesus' heart incarnates and reveals the heart of God, that wherever there is a man or a woman who suffers, wants healing, liberation and full life.

And this is why Jesus *opens His arms to sinners*. How many people continue, even today, in an erroneous life because they do not find anyone willing to look at them in a different way, with the eyes, or better, with the heart of God, that is, looking at them *with hope*. Jesus instead sees the possibility of resurrection also in those who have accumulated many mistaken choices. Jesus is always there, with an open heart; He throws open that mercy He has in His heart; He forgives, embraces, understands, approaches: this is how Jesus is!

At times we forget that for Jesus this is not an easy love, that came cheaply. The Gospels record the first negative reactions towards Jesus, precisely when He forgives the a man's sins (cf. *Mk 2: 1-12*). He was a man whose suffering was twofold: because he was unable to walk and because he felt "in error". And Jesus understood that the second pain was greater than the first, so He welcomed him immediately with the announcement of his liberation: "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5). He is freed of that sense of oppression, of feeling in the wrong. It is then that some of the scribes – those who think they are perfect ... I think of many Catholics who believe themselves perfect and look down on others, this is sad – some of the scribes present are scandalized by Jesus' words, which sound to them like blasphemy, because only God can forgive sins.

We, who are accustomed to experiencing the forgiveness of sins, perhaps at too easy a price, should at times remember how much we have cost to God's love. Each one of us cost a lot: Jesus' life! He would have given it even for just one of us. Jesus does not go to the cross because He heals the sick, because He preaches charity, because He proclaims the beatitudes. The Son of God goes to the cross above all because He forgives sins, because He wants the total and definitive liberation of man's heart. Because He does not accept that the human being spends all his existence with this indelible stamp, with the thought of not being able to be received by God's merciful heart. And with these sentiments Jesus goes towards sinners, which all of us are.

So sinners are forgiven. They are not only reassured at a psychological level, since they are freed of a sense of guilt. Jesus does much more: He offers those who have erred *the hope of a new life*. "But, Lord, I am a wretch" – "Look ahead and I will give you a new heart". This is the hope that Jesus gives us. A life marked by love. Matthew the publican becomes an apostle of Christ: Matthew, who is a traitor of the homeland, an exploiter of the people. Zacchaeus, a corrupt rich man of Jericho – he must surely have had a degree in taking bribes – is transformed into a benefactor of the poor. The woman of Samaria, who had five husbands and now lives with another, feels she is promised a "living water" that will always flow inside her (cf. *Jn 4: 14*). This is how Jesus changes the heart; He does this with all of us.

It is good for us to think that God has not chosen as the first clay to form His Church those people who have never made a mistake. The Church is a people of sinners who experience God's mercy and forgiveness. Peter understood more truth about himself at the cockcrow than from his efforts of generosity that swelled his chest and made him feel superior to others.

Brothers and sisters, we are all poor sinners, in need of the mercy of God Who has the strength to transform us

and to restore our hope, every day. And He does this! And to those who have understood this basic truth, God gives the most beautiful mission in the world, that is, love for brothers and sisters, and the proclamation of a mercy He denies to no-one. And this is our hope. Let us go ahead with this trust in forgiveness, in Jesus' merciful love.

### **Greetings in various languages**

#### ***French***

I am pleased to greet French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the faithful from France and French-speaking countries. May God's mercy and forgiveness transform us and offer us hope, to bear witness to a life marked by love. God bless you!

#### ***English***

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from Malta, Nigeria, Guam, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, I invoke the grace of the Lord Jesus, that you may be a sign of mercy and Christian hope in your homes and communities. May God bless you!

#### ***German***

A warm welcome to all German-speaking pilgrims. This holiday period offers us good opportunities to experience the joy of living Christ's love in our families and among friends. Jesus teaches us to love each other, to forgive and to give ourselves to others. Happy holidays!

#### ***Spanish***

I warmly greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, especially groups from Spain and Latin America. I urge you to be witnesses of this love among your brethren, and proclaimers of the mercy that the Lord denies to no-one. God bless you!

#### ***Portuguese***

I address a cordial greeting to Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, inviting to all to remain faithful to Christ Jesus. He challenges us to come out of our small, limited world, towards the Kingdom of God and true freedom. May the Holy Spirit enlighten us so that we can take God's blessing to all men. May the Virgin Mary watch over your path and keep you.

#### ***Arabic***

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East. Jesus did not found a Church made up of good and righteous people, but of sinners and the weak who have experienced God's mercy and endeavour to live according to His will, through the paths of their everyday life. Therefore the primary and fundamental mission of the Church is that of being a *field hospital*, and a place of healing, mercy and forgiveness, and of being a source of hope for all the suffering, the desperate, the poor, sinners and the rejected. May the Lord bless you and protect you always from evil.

#### ***Polish***

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, may the forgiveness for our sins that we receive as a

gift of the merciful love of Christ be for us a source of hope and a reason to be merciful towards others.

Today in a special way I join spiritually with those who from various cities of Poland make a pilgrimage on foot to the Shrine of the Mother of God in Jasna Gora. May the Mother and Queen of Poland welcome the effort and prayers of the pilgrims and obtain from her Son the fullness of grace for them, for their families and for the entire nation. God bless you!

### ***Italian***

I greet Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular, I wish to address a word of welcome to the women religious of Mary Immaculate-Claretian Missionaries, gathered in their General Chapter, and to the Sisters of Charity of St. Joan Antide, who are preparing to give their perpetual vows. Dear sisters, always be joyful, even rowdy, and bear witness everywhere to the beauty of your consecrated to God and to the Gospel. I greet the faithful of the parish of Santa Maria del Carmine in Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, entrusting them to the Holy Virgin that she may make the life of each one of you rich in the fruits of goodness.

My warm thoughts turn, finally, to the young, the sick and newlyweds, here in Rome in this period. I hope, dear young people, that the encounter with many places rich in culture, art and faith may be a fruitful occasion for knowing and imitating the example left to us by many witnesses of the Gospel who have lived here, such as St. Lawrence, whose feast day we celebrate tomorrow. I encourage you, dear people who are sick, to join constantly with the suffering Jesus in bearing with faith the cross for the redemption of the world. I hope that you, dear newlyweds, will build your new family on the solid foundation of faithfulness to the Gospel of Love.

### **Appeal of the Holy Father**

I am profoundly saddened by the massacre that took place last Sunday in Nigeria, inside a church, where innocent people were killed. And unfortunately this morning news reaches us of murderous violence in the Central African Republic, against Christian communities. I hope that there may be an end to every form of hatred and violence, and that such shameful crimes perpetrated in places of worship, where the faithful gather to pray, may never be repeated. Let us think of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria and in the Central African Republic. Let us pray for them, all together: *Hail Mary...*

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