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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 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 his recent trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh.

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!

Today I would like to speak about the apostolic trip I made in recent days in Myanmar and Bangladesh. It was a great gift from God, and therefore I thank Him for everything, especially for the encounters I was able to have. I would like again to express my gratitude to the authorities of the two countries and to their respective bishops for

all the work of preparation and for the welcome reserved to me and to my collaborators. I would also like to give heartfelt thanks to the Burmese and Bengalese people, who showed me such faith and such affection: thank you!

For the first time, a Successor of Peter visited Myanmar, and this occurred shortly after diplomatic relations were established between this country and the Holy See.

In this case too, I wanted to express the closeness of Christ and of the Church to a people that has suffered due to conflicts and repressions, and which is now slowly journeying towards a new condition of freedom and of peace. A people among whom the Buddhist religion is deeply rooted, with its spiritual and ethical principles, and where Christians are present as a small flock and leaven of the Kingdom of God. This Church, living and fervent, I have had the glory of confirming in faith and in communion, in the meeting with the bishops of the country and in the two Eucharistic celebrations. The first was in the large sports area in the centre of Yangon, and the Gospel of that day reminded us that persecution on account of faith in Jesus was normal for His disciples, as an occasion for witness, but also that “not a hair of their head will perish” (cf. *Lk 21, 12-19*). The second Mass, the final act of my visit to Myanmar, was dedicated to the *young: a sign of hope* and a special gift of the Virgin Mary, in the cathedral that bears her name. In the faces of those young people, full of joy, I saw the future of Asia: a future that will not belong to those who build weapons, but to those who sow joy. And again as a sign of hope, I blessed the first stones of sixteen churches, the seminary and the nunciature: eighteen!

Besides the Catholic community, I was able to meet the authorities of Myanmar, encouraging efforts for the pacification of the country and expressing my hope that *all the different members of the nation*, none excluded, may *cooperate in this process in mutual respect*. In this spirit, I wished to meet the representatives of the different religious communities present in the country. In particular, I expressed to the Supreme Council of Buddhist monks the Church’s esteem for their ancient spiritual tradition, and the confidence that *Christians and Buddhists* together can help people love God and neighbour, rejecting every form of violence and opposing evil with goodness.

After leaving Myanmar, I went to *Bangladesh*, where first of all I paid homage to the martyrs to the struggle for independence and to the “Father of the Nation”. The population of Bangladesh is for the most part of Muslim faith, and therefore my visit – following the footsteps of Blessed Paul VI and of Saint John Paul II – marked a further step *in favour of respect and dialogue between Christianity and Islam*.

I reminded the authorities of the country that the Holy See has supported from the beginning the will of the Bangladeshi people to constitute themselves as an independent nation, as well as the need for religious freedom always to be protected in this. In particular, I wished to express my solidarity with Bangladesh in its commitment to assisting Rohingya refugees which have entered the country in large numbers, where the population density is already among the world’s highest.

The Mass celebrated in an historic park in Dhaka was enriched by the *ordination of sixteen priests*, and this was one of the most meaningful and joyful events of the trip. Indeed, both in Bangladesh and in Myanmar, and in the other countries of south-east Asia, thanks to God there is no lack of vocations, a sign of living communities where there resonates the voice of the Lord Who calls them to follow Him. I shared this joy with the *bishops of Bangladesh*, and I encouraged them in their generous work for families, for the poor, for education, for dialogue and for social peace. And I shared this joy with many *priests and consecrated persons* of the country, as well as *seminarians and novices*, in whom I saw the seedlings of the Church in that land.

In Dhaka we lived an important moment of *interreligious and ecumenical dialogue*, which enabled me to underline the openness of the heart as the basis for the culture of encounter, harmony and peace. I also visited the “Mother Teresa House”, where the saint stayed when she was in the city, and which welcomes many orphans and people with disabilities. There, in accordance with their charism, the nuns live every day as a prayer or adoration and service to the poor and suffering Christ. And a smile is never, ever missing from their lips: nuns who pray a lot, who serve the suffering, and continually, with a smile. It is a beautiful witness. I thank those dear nuns.

The final event was with young Bangladeshis, rich in testimonies, hymns and dances. But how well they dance, these Bangladeshis! They know how to dance well! A celebration that expressed the joy of the Gospel, welcomed by that culture; a joy made fruitful by the sacrifices of so many missionaries, so many catechists and Christian parents. The meeting was also attended by young Muslims and members of other religions: a sign of hope for Bangladesh, for Asia and for the whole world. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am happy to greet pilgrims from France and from various Francophone countries, in particular those of the delegation of Lorraine and of Catholic scouts. In this time of Advent, may the Lord help you, along with the populations of Myanmar and Bangladesh, to open hearts to loving and favouring one's neighbour. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from Wales, Denmark, Nigeria and the United States of America. I offer a particular greeting to the members of the World Youth Alliance and the musical group Up with People. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

I heartily greet German-speaking brothers and sisters, especially participants in the pilgrimage of the Schönstatt movement. The Lord invites us in this time of Advent to go towards Him: He Who makes Himself known in the smallest, the sick and the needy. May the Holy Spirit guide you on your path.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, especially groups from Spain and Latin America. In this time of Advent, I encourage you to strengthen your Christian life with prayer, listening to the Word of God and works of charity and, following the example of Mary Immaculate, whose solemnity we will celebrate the day after tomorrow, prepare your heart to receive the Lord who is coming. Many thanks.

Portuguese

I extend a cordial greeting to the Portuguese-speaking pilgrims here present, particularly the faithful of Brazil. Dear friends, at this beginning of Advent, we are invited to meet Jesus who awaits us in all those in need, to whom we can bring the light of the Gospel and the relief of charity. God bless you!

Arabic

I address a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Jordan, the Holy Land and the Middle East. He who does not suffer with his suffering brother, even if different to him in race, religion, language or culture, must ask himself whether his faith and humanity are sincere. I was very touched by the meeting with Rohingya refugees and I asked them to forgive us for our shortcomings and our silence, asking the international community to help them and to assist all oppressed and persecuted groups present in the world. May the Lord

bless you all and protect you from the evil one.

Polish

I welcome Polish pilgrims, in particular those who have made the effort to donate and bring this beautiful Christmas tree to Saint Peter's Square. Many thanks! Next Sunday in Poland will be the day for Prayer and Aid to the Church of the East. I entrust to God this work, a sign of care for the faithful and pastors of neighbouring countries. I thank you also for accompanying me in prayer during my recent apostolic trip. I bless you heartily! Jesus Christ be praised!

Italian

I address a warm welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I greet parish groups, scholastic institutes participating in the project of formation in legality of the archdiocese of Capua, and the associations, in particular: Friends of Raoul Follereau Italy, Italian Catholic businesspeople, parents of children affected by leukaemia or tumours, and members of the Civil Protection of Cerveteri. May the visit to the Eternal City help each one of you to live intensely the time of Advent in preparation for the Nativity of the Lord Jesus. I welcome faithful from Episcopia and gladly bless the halo you have placed on the image of Our Lady, venerated in the local Shrine.

I greet and welcome with joy the Syro-Iraqi refugees resident in Italy, as well as priests, nuns and laypeople from Myanmar and Bangladesh, who are present here to repay my visit to their country of origin.

A special thought goes to the young, the sick and newlyweds. Today is the memorial of Saint Nicholas of Bari. Dear young people, place your search for God and His love above all else, dear people who are sick, may the example of the saints be of help and comfort in moments of greatest need; and you, dear newlyweds, with the grace of God make your union stronger and deeper every day.

Appeal of the Holy Father

My thoughts now turn to Jerusalem. In this regard, I cannot remain silent about my deep concern for the situation that has developed in recent days and, at the same time, I wish to make a heartfelt appeal to ensure that everyone is committed to respecting the status quo of the city, in accordance with the relevant Resolutions of the United Nations.

Jerusalem is a unique city, sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, where the Holy Places for the respective religions are venerated, and it has a special vocation to peace.

I pray to the Lord that such identity be preserved and strengthened for the benefit of the Holy Land, the Middle East and the entire world, and that wisdom and prudence prevail, to avoid adding new elements of tension in a world already shaken and scarred by many cruel conflicts.
