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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in Saint Peter's Square. The Holy Father resumed his cycle of catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles. The Bible reading was *He was added to the eleven apostles* (Acts of the Apostles, 1: 21-22, 26).

After the catechesis and the summary of his catechesis in different languages, the Pope gave special greetings to the groups of faithful from all over the world. The general audience ended with the recitation of the *Pater Noster*, and the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have begun a journey of catechesis that will follow the "journey": the journey of the Gospel narrated by the book of the Acts of the Apostles, because this book certainly shows the journey of the Gospel, how the Gospel went beyond, beyond, beyond ... Everything starts from the Resurrection of Christ. This, in fact, is not an event among others, but is the source of new life. The disciples know this and – obedient to Jesus' command – remain united, united and persevering in prayer. They gather closely around Mary, the Mother, and prepare to receive the power of God not in a passive way, but consolidating the communion between them.

That first community was formed of 120 brothers and sisters, more or less: a number that carries within itself the 12, emblematic for Israel, because it represents the twelve tribes, and emblematic for the Church, because of the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus. Now, after the painful events of the Passion, there are no longer twelve Apostles of the Lord, but eleven. One of them, Judas, is no longer there: he has taken his life, crushed by remorse.

He had already begun to separate himself from the communion with the Lord and with others, to go alone, to isolate himself, to become attached to money to the point of exploiting the poor, to lose sight of the horizon of

gratuitousness and self-giving, to the point of allowing the virus of pride to infect his mind and heart, transforming him from a “friend” (*Mt* 26: 50) into an enemy and into the “leader of those who arrested Jesus” (*Acts* 1: 16). Judas had received the great grace of being part of the group of people close to Jesus and of participating in His ministry, but at a certain point he sought to “save” his own life with the result of losing it (see *Lk* 9: 24). He ceased to belong to Jesus with his heart and placed himself outside of the communion with Him and His followers. He stopped being a disciple and placed himself above the Master. He sold Him and with the “price of his crime” he bought land, which produced no fruit but was imbued with his own blood (see Acts 1: 18-19).

While Judas preferred death to life (see *Dt* 30:19; *Sir* 15.17) and followed the example of the wicked whose way is like darkness and goes to ruin (see *Pr* 4.19; *Ps* 1, 6), the Eleven instead choose life and blessing; they become responsible in making it flow in history, from generation to generation, from the people of Israel to the Church.

The evangelist Luke shows us that in the face of the abandonment of one of the Twelve, who has created a wound to the body of the community, it is necessary that his assignment pass to another. And who could hire him? Peter indicates the requirement: the new member must have been a disciple of Jesus from the beginning, that is, from baptism in the Jordan, to the end, that is, to ascension to Heaven (see *Acts* 1: 21-22). The group of the Twelve needs to be reconstituted. At this point the practice of community discernment is inaugurated, which consists of seeing reality with the eyes of God, from the perspective of unity and communion.

There are two candidates: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Then the whole community prays as follows: “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left” (*Acts* 1: 24-25). And, by fate, the Lord indicates Matthias, who is associated with the Eleven. Thus the body of the Twelve is re-established, as a sign of communion, and communion wins over divisions, isolation, the mentality that absolutizes the private space, a sign that communion is the first witness that the Apostles offer. Jesus had said it thus: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (*Jn* 13: 35).

The Twelve manifest the style of the Lord in the Acts of the Apostles. They are the accredited witnesses of Christ’s work of salvation and do not manifest their presumed perfection to the world but, through the grace of unity, they bring out an Other who now lives in a new way among His people. And who is this? It is the Lord Jesus. The Apostles choose to live under the lordship of the Risen One in unity among brothers, which becomes the only possible atmosphere for the authentic gift of self.

We too need to rediscover the beauty of bearing witness to the Risen One, to emerge from self-referential attitudes, to renounce holding back the gifts of God and not to yield to mediocrity. The reunification of the apostolic college shows how in the DNA of the Christian community there is unity and freedom from oneself, which allow us not to fear diversity, not to attach ourselves to things and gifts and to become *martyres*, that is, luminous witnesses of God, living and active in history.

Greetings in English

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, especially those from England, Ireland, Finland, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the Divine Word Missionaries from Indonesia and the interreligious delegation from Hong Kong, led by Cardinal John Tong Hon. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Addressing Polish pilgrims, the Pope said “I know that many of you and thousands of your compatriots participated in the March for Life last Sunday, carrying the message that life is sacred as it is a gift from God. We are called to defend and serve life, from conception in the womb until advanced age, when it is marked by disease and suffering. It is not permissible to destroy life, to make it the object of experiments or false conceptions. I ask you to pray that human life will always be respected, bearing witness to Gospel values, especially in the family. I bless you and your loved ones with all my heart.

He also greeted in Italian the Institutes that celebrate their respective General Chapters: the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and the Third Regular Order of Saint Francis.

He also recalled that the liturgical memory of Saint Anthony of Padua, famous preacher and patron saint of the poor and those who suffer, is celebrated tomorrow. “May his intercession help you to experience the succour of divine mercy”.