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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Marseille for the conclusion of the “Rencontres Méditerranéennes” (22 to 23 September 2023) – Holy Mass in the Vélodrome Stadium of Marseille

Holy Mass in the *Vélodrome* Stadium of Marseille

Greeting of the Holy Father at the end of the Holy Mass

In the afternoon, after taking leave of the staff and benefactors of the archbishopric, the Holy Father Francis transferred to the *Vélodrome* Stadium. After changing vehicle in front of the statue of David of Marseille, the Pope continued by popemobile until his arrival at the Stadium, accompanied along the route by around 100,000 people. After touring among the faithful and pilgrims present, approximately 50,000 in number, at 16.10 the Holy Father presided over the Eucharistic celebration in French.

During the Holy Mass, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Pope delivered his homily.

At the end, after the address of greeting from the metropolitan archbishop of Marseille, His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, and before the blessing, Pope Francis addressed a final greeting and some words of thanks to the faithful and pilgrims in attendance. He then transferred by car to Marseille International Airport for the farewell ceremony.

The following are the homily and final greeting given by the Holy Father during the Holy Mass:

Holy Mass in the *Vélodrome* Stadium of Marseille

The Scriptures tell us that, having established his kingdom, King David decided to transport the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. After summoning the people, he rose and set out to bring the Ark; on the way, he and

the people danced before it, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord (cf. *2 Sam* 6:1-15). It is against the backdrop of this scene that the evangelist Luke recounts Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Mary, too, rises and sets out for the region of Jerusalem, and when she enters Elizabeth's house, the child she is carrying, recognizing the arrival of the Messiah, leaps for joy and begins to dance as David had before the Ark (cf. *Lk* 1:39-45).

Mary, then, is presented as the true Ark of the Covenant, introducing the incarnate Lord into the world. She is the young Virgin who goes to meet the barren, elderly woman and, in bringing Jesus, becomes a sign of God's visitation that overcomes all sterility. She is the Mother who goes up to the mountains of Judah, to tell us that God is setting out to seek us with his love, so that we might exult with joy. It is God who is setting out!

In these two women, Mary and Elizabeth, God's visitation to humanity is revealed. One is young and the other old, one is a virgin and the other barren, yet they are both pregnant in an "impossible" way. This is God's work in our lives; he makes possible even what seems impossible, he generates life even amidst sterility.

Brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves honestly, from the heart: Do we believe that God is at work in our lives? Do we believe that the Lord, in hidden and often unpredictable ways, acts in history, performs wonders, and is working even in our societies that are marked by worldly secularism and a certain religious indifference?

There is a way to discern whether or not we have this trust in the Lord. What is the way? The Gospel says that "as soon as Elizabeth had heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb" (v. 41). This is the sign: *to leap for joy*. Whoever believes, whoever prays, whoever welcomes the Lord leaps in the Spirit, and feels that something is moving within, and "dances" with joy. I would like to dwell on this: the leap of faith.

The experience of faith, first and foremost, elicits a certain *leaping in the face of life*. To leap means to be "touched inside," to have an interior quiver, to feel that something is moving in our heart. This is the opposite of a flat, cold heart, accustomed to the quiet life, which is encased in indifference and becomes impermeable. Such a heart becomes hardened and insensitive to everything and everyone, even to the tragic discarding of human life, which is seen today in the rejection of many immigrants, of countless unborn children and abandoned elderly people. A cold, flat heart drags life along mechanically, without passion, without impetus, without desire. In our European society, a person can become ill from all this and suffer cynicism, disenchantment, resignation, uncertainty, and an overall sadness – all this together: sadness, that sadness hidden in human hearts. Someone has called these dispositions "sad passions" and are found in those who do not "leap in the face of life".

Those who are born to faith, on the other hand, recognize the presence of the Lord, like the baby in Elizabeth's womb. They recognize his work as each day dawns and receive new eyes to view reality. Even in the midst of toil, problems and suffering, each day they discern God's visitation among us and feel accompanied and sustained by him. Faced with the mystery of life and the challenges of society, those who believe have a spring in their step, a passion, a dream to cultivate, an interest that impels them to personally commit themselves. Now each of us can ask ourselves: do I feel these things? Do I have these things? Those who are like this know that in everything the Lord is present, calling and inviting them to witness to the Gospel with meekness, in order to build a new world, using the gifts and charisms they have received.

Besides enabling us to *leap in the face of life*, the experience of faith also compels us to *leap toward our neighbour*. Indeed, in the mystery of the Visitation, we see that God's visitation does not take place through extraordinary, heavenly events, but in the simplicity of an encounter. God comes to the doorway of a family home, in the tender embrace between two women, in the intertwining of two pregnancies full of wonder and hope. There we see the solicitude of Mary, the wonder of Elizabeth, and the joy of sharing.

Let us always remember this in the Church: God is relational and often visits us through human encounters, when we know how to be open to others, when there is a "stirring" within us in favour of those who pass us every day, and when our hearts do not remain impassive and insensitive before the wounds of the fragile. Our major cities and many European countries like France, where different cultures and religions coexist, are a strong force against the excesses of individualism, selfishness and rejection that generate loneliness and suffering. Let us learn from Jesus how to stir ourselves to help those who live nearby. Let us learn from him who is moved to

compassion before a weary and exhausted crowd (cf. *Mk 6:34*) and “leaps with mercy” before the wounded flesh of those he meets. As one of your great saints, Vincent de Paul, exhorts, “we should, then, soften our hearts and make them aware of the sufferings and miseries of our neighbour. We should beg God to give us that spirit of mercy which is the very Spirit of God himself,” to the point of recognizing that the poor are “our lords and masters” (*Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, Paris 1920-25, 341; 392-393).

Brothers and sisters, I think of the many “stirrings” within France, with its history rich in holiness and culture; artists and thinkers who have inspired many generations. Today, too, our life and the life of the Church, France and Europe need this: the grace of a leap forward, a new leap in faith, charity and hope. We need to rekindle our passion and enthusiasm, to reawaken our desire to commit ourselves to fraternity. We need to once again risk loving our families and dare to love the weakest, and to rediscover in the Gospel the transforming grace that makes life beautiful.

Let us look to Mary, who inconveniences herself by setting out on a journey and who teaches us that this is God’s way: He inconveniences us, sets us in motion and makes us “leap”, similar to the experience of Elizabeth. We want to be Christians who encounter God in prayer, and our brothers and sisters in love; Christians who leap, pulsate, and receive the fire of the Holy Spirit and then allow ourselves to be set afire by the questions of our day, by the challenges of the Mediterranean, by the cry of the poor – and by the “holy utopias” of fraternity and peace that wait to be realized.

Brothers and sisters, together with you, I pray to our Lady, Notre Dame de la Garde, that she will watch over your lives, that she will guard France and will guard all of Europe, and that she will cause us to leap in the Spirit. I would like to offer this prayer using the words of Paul Claudel: “I see the church, open.... I have nothing to offer and nothing to ask. I come, Mother, only to look at you. To look at you, to weep for happiness, knowing that I am your son, and that you are there.... To be with you, Mary, in this place where you are.... Because you are there, always... Simply because you are Mary... Simply because you exist... Mother of Jesus Christ, thanks be to you (“The Virgin at Noon”, *Poèmes de Guerre 1914-1916*, Paris, 1992).

Greeting of the Holy Father at the end of the Holy Mass

I thank you, Your Eminence, for your words and I thank you all, brothers and sisters, for your presence and for your prayers: thank you!

Having now come to the end of this Visit, I would like to express my gratitude for the warm welcome I received, as well as for all the work and preparation that went into it. I thank the President of the Republic and, through him, I extend cordial greetings to all the men and women of France. I greet the Prime Minister who came to welcome me at the airport and I also greet the authorities present, in particular the Mayor of Marseille.

I embrace the entire Church of Marseille, with its parishes and religious communities, its numerous educational institutions and its charitable organizations. This Archdiocese was the first in the world to be consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, during an outbreak of the plague in 1720. It is therefore in your hearts to be signs of God’s tender love, also in the midst of today’s “epidemic of indifference”. Thank you for your gentle and committed service, which bears witness to the closeness and compassion of the Lord!

Several of you have come here from various parts of France: *merci à vous!* I would like to greet the brothers and sisters from Nice, accompanied by their Bishop and Mayor. I recall the terrible attack of 14 July 2016, of which you are survivors. Let us prayerfully remember all those who lost their lives in that tragedy, as well as in all the terrorist acts that have been perpetrated in France and in every part of the world. Terrorism is cowardly. Let us not tire of praying for peace in war-torn regions, and especially for the war-torn people of Ukraine.

I send my heartfelt greetings to the sick, to children and the elderly, who are the memory of civilization. I think

especially of those in difficulty and all workers in this city: Jacques Loew, France's first worker-priest, worked at the port of Marseille. May the dignity of workers be respected, promoted and protected!

Dear brothers and sisters, I will carry the encounters of these days in my heart. May *Notre Dame de la Garde* watch over this city, which is a mosaic of hope, over all your families, and over each of you. *Je vous bénis. S'il vous plaît, n'oubliez pas de prier pour moi. Ce travail n'est pas facile! Merci.* (I bless you. Please do not forget to pray for me. This job is not easy! Thank you.
