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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 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, which was read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on *The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer*, focusing on the theme "Proclamation is for today" (Bible reading *1 Pt* 3: 15-16).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present.

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

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

The last few times we saw that Christian proclamation is a *joy*, and it is *for everyone*; today we will see a third aspect: it is *for today*.

One almost always hears bad things being said about today. Certainly, with wars, climate change, worldwide injustice and migration, family and hope crises, there is no shortage of cause for concern. In general, today seems to be inhabited by a culture that puts the individual above all else and technology at the centre of everything, with its ability to solve many problems and its gigantic advances in so many fields. But at the same time, this culture of technical-individual progress leads to the affirmation of a freedom that does not want to set itself limits and is indifferent to those who fall behind. And so, it consigns great human aspirations to the often voracious logic of the economy, with a vision of life that discards those who do not produce and struggles to look

beyond the immanent. We could even say that we find ourselves in the first civilization in history that globally seeks to organize a human society without the presence of God, concentrated in huge cities that remain horizontal despite their vertiginous skyscrapers.

The account of the city of Babel and its tower comes to mind (cf. *Gen* 11:1-9). It narrates a social project that involves sacrificing all individuality to the efficiency of the collective. Humanity speaks just one language – we might say that it has a “single way of thinking” – as if enveloped in a kind of general spell that absorbs the uniqueness of each into a bubble of uniformity. Then God confuses the languages, that is, He re-establishes differences, recreates the conditions for uniqueness to develop, revives the multiple where ideology would like to impose the single. The Lord also distracts humanity from its delirium of omnipotence: “Let us make a name for ourselves”, say the exalting inhabitants of Babel (v. 4), who want to reach up to heaven, to put themselves in God’s place. But these are dangerous, alienating, destructive ambitions, and the Lord, by confounding these expectations, protects mankind, preventing an impending disaster. This story really does seem topical: even today, cohesion, instead of fraternity and peace, is often based on ambition, nationalism, homologation, and techno-economic structures that inculcate the persuasion that God is insignificant and useless: not so much because one seeks *more knowledge*, but above all for the sake of *more power*. It is a temptation that pervades the great challenges of today’s culture.

In *Evangelii gaudium* I tried to describe others (cf. nos. 52-75), but above all I called for “an evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values. It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities” (no. 74). In other words, Jesus can be proclaimed only by inhabiting the culture of one’s own time; and always taking to heart the words of the Apostle Paul about the present: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (*2 Cor* 6:2). There is therefore no need to contrast today with alternative visions from the past. Nor is it sufficient to simply reiterate acquired religious convictions that, however true, become abstract with the passage of time. A truth does not become more credible because one raises one’s voice in speaking it, but because it is witnessed with one’s life.

Apostolic zeal is never a simple repetition of an acquired style, but testimony that the Gospel is alive today here for us. Aware of this, let us therefore look at our age and our culture as a gift. They are ours, and evangelizing them does not mean judging them from afar, nor is it standing on a balcony and shouting out Jesus’ name, but rather going down onto the streets, going to the places where one lives, frequenting the spaces where one suffers, works, studies and reflects, inhabiting the crossroads where human beings share what has meaning for their lives. It means being, as a Church, a leaven for “dialogue, encounter, unity. After all, our own formulations of faith are the fruit of dialogue and encounter among cultures, communities and various situations. We must not fear dialogue: on the contrary, it is precisely confrontation and criticism that help us to preserve theology from being transformed into ideology” (*Address at the Fifth National Congress of the Italian Church, Florence, 10 November 2015*).

It is necessary to stand at the crossroads of today. Leaving them would impoverish the Gospel and reduce the Church to a sect. Frequenting them, on the other hand, helps us Christians to understand in a renewed way the reasons for our hope, to extract and share from the treasure of faith “what is new and what is old” (*Mt* 13:52). In short, more than wanting to convert the world of today, we need to *convert pastoral care* so that it better incarnates the Gospel in today (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 25). Let us make Jesus’ desire our own: to help fellow travellers not to lose the desire for God, to open their hearts to Him and find the only One who, today and always, gives peace and joy to humanity.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those coming from Australia, Malaysia and the Philippines. I pray that each of you and your families may experience a blessed Advent, which will begin this Sunday, in preparation for the coming, at Christmas, of the newborn Jesus, Son of God and Prince of Peace.

God bless you!
