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General audience: fleet-footed messengers of hope

With the words of the prophet Isaiah, that help us to open up to hope, welcoming the Good News of the coming of the Lord, Pope Francis began his second catechesis dedicated to this theological virtue. This Wednesday's general audience took place in the Paul VI Hall, which is able to hold seven thousand people.

“Chapter 52 of Isaiah begins with the invitation to Jerusalem to awaken, to shake off the dust and bonds and to put on the most beautiful garments, because the Lord has come to free His people”, said the Holy Father. “And he adds: ‘My people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am’”.

“To this ‘Here I am’, spoken by God, which summarises all His will to salvation and closeness to us, responds the song of joy of Jerusalem, according to the prophet’s invitation. It is a very important historical moment”, he explained. “It is the end of the exile of Babylon, it is the possibility for Israel to find God again and, in faith, to rediscover itself. The Lord makes Himself near, and the remaining few, that is, the few who remained after the exile, and who in exile resisted in faith, that went through the crisis and continued to believe and to hope even in the midst of the darkness, the ‘remaining few’ will be able to see the wonders of God”.

“At this point the prophet inserts a song of praise, and says:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’.

[...]

Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem – the ruins must sing because the time for reconstruction has come, added the Pope -

for the Lord has comforted His people;
He has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has bared His holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God”.

These words of Isaiah, “refer to the miracle of peace, and do so in a very particular way, turning attention not on the messenger but on his fast-running feet: ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news’. He seems like the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, who runs to his beloved: ‘Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. And so too the messenger of peace runs, bring the good news of liberation, of salvation, and proclaiming that God reigns”.

“God has not abandoned His people and does not let Himself be defeated by evil, because He is faithful, and His grace is greater than sin. This we must learn, because we are stubborn and do not learn. But I will ask the question: what is greater, God or sin? God! And who wins in the end, God or sin? God. Is He capable of defeating the greatest sin, the most shameful, the most terrible, the worst? With what weapon does God defeat sin?” he added, again addressing the participants in the audience, who responded in unison: “With love!” “Very well”, he replied. “What theologians! And that God defeats sin means that ‘God reigns’; these are the words of faith in a Lord whose power bows down to humanity. God bows, God stoops to offer mercy and to free man from what disfigures in him the beautiful image of God, because when we are in sin the beautiful image of God is disfigured. And the fulfilment of so much love will indeed be the Kingdom established by Jesus, that Kingdom of forgiveness and peace that we celebrate with Christmas and which is definitively realised at Easter. The most beautiful joy of Christmas is that inner joy of peace: the Lord has cancelled my sins, the Lord has forgiven me, the Lord has had mercy on me, He has come to save me. This is the joy of Christmas”.

“These ... are the reasons for our hope”, Francis exclaimed. “When everything seems to be finished, when faced with so many negative situations, faith becomes arduous and there is the temptation to say that nothing has meaning any more; but here instead is the good news brought by those quick feet: God is coming to realise something new, to establish a kingdom of peace; God has ‘bared His arm’ and comes to bring freedom and consolation. Evil will not prevail for ever; there is an end to suffering. Desperation is vanquished, because God is in our midst”.

“And we too are urged to awaken, like Jerusalem, according to the invitation the prophet addresses to us; we are called to become men and women of hope, collaborating in the coming of this Kingdom made of light and intended for all. Men and women of hope. How sad it is when we meet a Christian who has lost hope! ‘But I don’t hope for anything, it is all over for me’: so says a Christian who is not capable of looking to horizons of hope and who has only a wall in front of his heart. But God tears down this wall with forgiveness! And this is why we must pray, so that God gives us hope every day, and gives it to all of us, that hope that is born when we see God in the Nativity scene. The message of the Good News that is entrusted to us is urgent: we too must run like the messenger on the mountains, because the world does not wait, and humanity hungers and thirsts for justice, truth and peace”.

“And seeing the little Child of Bethlehem, the little ones of the world will know that the promise is fulfilled, the message is realised. In a newborn child, in need of everything, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, is enclosed all the power of God Who saves. Christmas is a day for opening our heart. We need to open our heart to the smallness, there in that Child, and to wonder. It is the wonder of Christmas, for which we are preparing, with hope, in this time of Advent. It is the surprise of a child-God, of a poor God, of a weak God, of a God Who abandons His greatness to make Himself close to each one of us”.
