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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.20 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 the theme "Paradise, the goal of our hope".

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!

This is the final catechesis on the theme of Christian hope, which has accompanied us since the beginning of this liturgical year. And I will conclude by speaking about Paradise, as the goal of our hope.

"Paradise" is one of the final words pronounced by Jesus on the cross, addressed to the good thief. Let us pause a moment on this scene. Jesus is not alone on the cross. Next to Him, on the right and on the left, there are two wrongdoers. Perhaps, passing in front of those three crosses raised up on Golgotha, one might have

breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that finally justice was being done, by putting such people to death.

Next to Jesus there is also a confessed criminal: one who acknowledges that he has deserved that terrible punishment. We call him the “good thief” who, opposing himself to the other one, says: we receive what we have deserved for our actions (cf. *Lk 23: 41*).

On Calvary, on that tragic and holy Friday, Jesus reaches the extreme of His incarnation, of His solidarity with us sinners. There He realises what the prophet Isaiah had said to the suffering Servant: he “was numbered with the transgressors” (53: 12; cf. *Lk 22: 37*).

It is there, on Calvary, that Jesus has His final meeting with a sinner, to throw open also to him the doors of His Kingdom. It is the only time that the word “Paradise” appears in the Gospels. Jesus promises it to this “poor devil” who on the wood of the cross had the courage to address to Him the most humble of requests: “Remember me when you come into Your Kingdom” (*Lk 23: 42*). He had no good deeds to show, he had nothing, but he trusted in Jesus, Whom he recognised as innocent, good, so different from him (v. 41). That word of humble repentance was enough to touch Jesus’ heart.

The good thief reminds us of our true condition before God: that we are His children, that He feels compassion for us, that He is disarmed every time we express to him our nostalgia for His love. In the rooms of many hospitals or in prison cells this miracle is repeated countless times: there is no person, no matter how badly he has lived, to whom there remains only desperation, and to whom grace is prohibited. Before God we all appear empty-handed, a little like the publican in the parable who stopped to pray in the temple aside from the others (cf. *Lk 18: 13*). And every time a man, carrying out the final examination of conscience of his life, discovers that his shortcomings far outweigh his good deeds, he must not be discouraged, but trust in God’s mercy.

God is the Father, and until the end He awaits our return. And when the prodigal son returns and begins to confess his faults, his father silences him with an embrace (cf. *Lk 15: 20*).

Paradise is not a fantasy place, nor is it an enchanted garden. Paradise is the embrace of God, infinite Love, and we enter thanks to Jesus, Who died on the cross for us. Where there is Jesus, there is mercy and happiness; without Him there is cold and darkness. In the hour of death, the Christian repeats to Jesus, “Remember me”. And even if there were no-one to remind Him of us, Jesus is there, next to us. He wants to take us to the most beautiful place that exists. He wants to take us there with the good there has been in our life, great or small, because nothing is lost of what He had already redeemed. And in the house of the Father He will also take all that which in us still needs to be redeemed: the shortcomings and errors of an entire life. And this is the goal of our existence: that everything is fulfilled, and is transformed into love.

If we believe this, we stop fearing death, and we can also hope to depart from this world in a serene and trustful way. He who has known Jesus no longer fears anything. And we too will be able to repeat the words of the elderly Simeon, also blessed by the encounter with Jesus, after an entire life consumed in expectation: “Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation” (*Lk 2: 29-30*).

And in that instant, finally, we will no longer need anything, we will no longer see in a confused way. We will no longer weep pointlessly, because everything is passed; even the prophecies, even knowledge. But love no, that remains. Because “love abides” (cf. *1 Cor 13: 8*).

Greetings in various languages

French

I am happy to welcome French-speaking pilgrims from Switzerland, Belgium and France, especially the pilgrims from Coutance, Bayeux-Lisieux and Saint-Flour, accompanied by their respective bishops, as well as the Tamil Indian chaplain of France. Dear friends, I invite you to place all your trust in the mercy and tenderness God has for each one of you. He never abandons His children. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from England, Norway, India, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. I extend a particular welcome to the priests from the Metropolia of Nea Ionia of the Orthodox Church of Greece, accompanied by His Grace Metropolitan Gabriel. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

A cordial welcome to German-speaking pilgrims, in particular the students of the *Liebfrauen-Schule* of Nottuln, as well as those of the *Maria-Ward-Schule* of Bamberg, in Rome on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the institute and accompanied by Msgr. Ludwig Schick. Jesus, our brother and teacher, encourages us to leave our homes to carry out good deeds, and He brings to fulfilment what we are unable to do. May the Lord bless you and your families.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you always to place your trust in the Lord, asking that in the last moment of our life He remember us and open the doors of Paradise to us. God bless you.

Portuguese

I address a special greeting to all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, in particular the faithful of Roraima, accompanied by their pastor, and to the various groups from Brazil. Dear friends, faith in eternal life inspires us not to be afraid of the challenges of this present life, strengthened by the hope of Christ's victory over death. God bless you.

Arabic

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Iraq, Jordan and the Holy Land. Paradise is the goal and the objective of our existence. It is the gift that God offers us, not for our merits, but out of the immensity of His mercy and His infinite love; it is the embrace of the Father Who awaits us to grant us His forgiveness and to restore to us our dignity, lost as a result of our sins and our drifting away from Him. May the Lord bless you and always keep you from evil.

Polish

I give a cordial welcome to Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, concluding today our reflections on Christian hope, we turn our gaze towards Paradise, where our heavenly Father awaits us with open arms. We will be introduced there by merciful Jesus, Who, high up on the cross, never ceases to promise Paradise to every repentant sinner. We ask Him with hope, "Jesus, remember us...".

I heartily bless you and your loved ones.

Italian

A cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims!

I am pleased to welcome the Servants of Mary Ministers of the Sick and the Eudist Fathers. May the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles be an opportunity for growth in God's love, so that your communities may become a place where communion and service are experienced.

I greet associations and parish groups, especially the faithful of Saint Lucia and Saint Apollinare in Frisia, and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in San Ferdinando di Puglia; hospital volunteers from Caserta and the Movement of the Message of Fatima.

Finally, I greet the young, the sick and newly-weds. At the end of the month of October I wish to recommend you pray the Holy Rosary. May this Marian prayer be for you, dear young people, an opportunity to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ, working in our lives; love the Rosary, dear people who are sick, as it gives consolation and meaning to your sufferings. May it become for you, dear newlyweds, a special occasion for experiencing that spiritual intimacy with God that is the basis of a new family.
