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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.35 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 "Why attend Mass on Sunday?"

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!

Resuming the journey of our catechesis on Mass, today we ask ourselves: *why attend Mass on Sunday?*

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is at the centre of the life of the Church (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2177). We Christians go to Mass on Sundays to meet the Risen Lord, or rather to let ourselves be met by Him, to listen to His word, be nourished at His table, and thus become Church, or rather His mystical living Body in the world today.

From the first hour the disciples of Jesus understood Him; they celebrated the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord on the day of the week that the Jews called “the first of the week” and the Romans “day of the sun”, because on that day Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to the disciples, talking to them, eating with them, giving them the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mt 28: 1, Mk 16: 9-14, Lk 24: 1-13, Jn 20: 1-19*). The great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost also took place on Sunday, the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus. For these reasons, Sunday is a holy day for us, sanctified by the Eucharistic celebration, the living presence of the Lord among us and for us. It is the Mass, therefore, that makes Christian Sunday! What kind of Sunday, for a Christian, is one in which there is no meeting with the Lord?

There are Christian communities that, unfortunately, can not enjoy Mass every Sunday; however, on this holy day, they are called to gather in prayer in the name of the Lord, listening to the Word of God and keeping alive the desire of the Eucharist.

Some secular societies have lost the Christian meaning of Sunday illuminated by the Eucharist. This is a shame! In these contexts it is necessary to revive this awareness, in order to recover the meaning of the celebration, the meaning of joy, of the parish community, of solidarity, of rest that restores the soul and the body (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2777-2188*). The Eucharist is the teacher of all these values, Sunday after Sunday. This is why Vatican Council II wanted to reiterate that “the Lord's day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106).

Abstention from work on a Sunday did not exist in the first centuries: it is a specific contribution of Christianity. By biblical tradition, the Jews rest on Saturday, while in Roman society there was no weekly day of abstention from servile labour. It was the Christian sense of living as sons and not slaves, animated by the Eucharist, that made Sunday – almost universally – the day of rest.

Without Christ we are condemned to be dominated by the fatigue of everyday life, with its worries, and by the fear of tomorrow. The Sunday meeting with the Lord gives us the strength to live today with trust and courage and to move forward with hope. This is why we Christians go to encounter the Lord on Sunday, in the Eucharistic celebration.

The Eucharistic communion with Jesus, Risen and Living in eternity, is a foretaste of Sunday without sunset, when there will be no more effort, nor will there be pain, nor grief, nor tears, but only the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord. The Sunday Mass also speaks to us of this blessed repose, teaching us, as the week flows, to entrust ourselves to the hands of the Father Who is in heaven.

What can we answer to those who say that there is no need to go to Mass, not even on a Sunday, why is it important to live well, to love others? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (*Jn 13:35*); but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the necessary energy to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass to give something to God, but *to receive from Him what we really need*. This is recalled by Church's prayer to, which thus addresses God: “You have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness, but profit us for salvation” (Roman Missal, Common Preface IV).

In conclusion, why go to Mass on Sundays? It is not enough to answer that it is a precept of the Church; this helps to preserve its value, but it is not enough alone. We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with the grace of Jesus, with His living presence in us and among us, can we put into practice His commandment, and thus be His credible witnesses.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims. As in this time of Advent we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord, let us remember that He comes to encounter us every Sunday in the Eucharistic celebration, and that we must participate, receiving His grace and following Him. God bless you!

English

I am pleased to greet the participants in the 2017 Forum of Catholic-inspired Non-Governmental Organizations meeting in Rome during these days. I express my deep appreciation for your efforts to bring the light of the Gospel to the various peripheries of our world, in order to defend human dignity, to promote the integral development of peoples, and to meet the material and spiritual needs of so many members of our human family. I encourage you to work always in a spirit of communion and cooperation with other Catholic NGOs and with the representatives of the Holy See, as an expression of the Church's commitment to the building of a more just and fraternal world. With prayerful good wishes that these days of reflection and discussion will prove fruitful for your work, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

I also greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from Australia, Indonesia, India, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

I am pleased to welcome German-speaking brothers and sisters. In particular, I greet the delegation from the *Land* of Upper Austria, along with pilgrims from the diocese of Linz with the bishop Msgr. Manfred Scheuer, and I thank you for the "Light of Peace" brought from Bethlehem. In every Mass we beg for the Lord's peace; the world is in need of it. A good Advent to you all.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular the groups from Spain and Latin America. Let us pray to the Lord for all those communities that cannot celebrate Mass every Sunday for a lack of priests, or for other circumstances, so that the Risen Lord may be present among them, through prayer and listening to the Word, always keeping alive the desire for the Eucharist.

Portuguese

I address a cordial greeting to Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, inviting all to stay faithful to the Sunday encounter with Jesus Christ. He challenges us to come out of our small and restricted world, towards the Kingdom of God and true freedom. May the Holy Spirit enlighten you so that you may take God's blessing to all mankind. May the Virgin Mary watch over your path and keep you.

Arabic

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Syria, Lebanon and the Middle East. Saint Jerome (420) stated that Sunday is "the day of the Lord, the day of Resurrection, the day of Christians, our day ... The day of the sun [on which] the sun of justice appeared, whose rays bring salvation" (CCL, 78, 550, 52). Let us remember that, like every plant that needs sun and nourishment to live, every Christian needs the Sunday Eucharist to live truly. May the Lord bless you all and protect you from the evil one.

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. We are living the time of Advent, and we are awaiting the coming of Christ. Let us remember that our expectation is fulfilled in every Holy Mass that we attend. The Lord Jesus comes to us to make us know His name, His true face, to make us experience His presence and His infinite mercy. Therefore, may the prospect of participating in Holy Mass be for us not an imposition, but a privilege granted to us. Jesus Christ be praised.

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. May the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles be an opportunity to grow in the love of God, so that your communities may become places in which communion and mission are experienced.

I greet the parishes, schools, associations and groups, especially the Jacques Maritain international institute.

Finally I address a thought to the young, the sick and the newlyweds. Today the liturgy commemorates Saint Lucia, virgin and martyr: dear young people, contemplate the greatness of the love of Jesus that is born and dies for us; dear people who are sick, courageously accept your suffering for the conversion of sinners; and you, dear newlyweds, give more space to prayer especially in this time of Advent, so that your life may become a path of Christian perfection.
