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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience, the first of the year 2018, took place at 9.25 a.m. 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, the Pope continued the cycle of catechesis on the Holy Mass, focusing on the Penitential Act.

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 catechesis on the Eucharistic celebration, let us consider today, in the context of the introductory rites, the *penitential act*. In its sobriety, it promotes the attitude with which we dispose ourselves to celebrate the holy mysteries in a worthy manner, that is, acknowledging our sins before God and our brothers, acknowledging that we are sinners. Indeed, the priest's invitation is addressed to all the community in prayer, as we are all sinners. What can the Lord give to one whose heart is already full of himself, of his own success? Nothing,

because the presumptuous is incapable of receiving forgiveness, as he is already satiated with his own assumed righteousness. Let us think of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, in which only the second – the publican – returns home justified, that is, forgiven (cf. *Lk 18: 9-14*). Those who are aware of their own miseries and who lower their eyes with humility, feel the merciful gaze of God resting on them. We know from experience that only those who can recognize their mistakes and apologize receive the understanding and forgiveness of others.

Listening in silence to the voice of conscience allows us to recognize that our thoughts are distant from divine thoughts, that our words and our actions are often mundane, that is, guided by choices contrary to the Gospel. Therefore, at the beginning of the Mass, we carry out as a community the penitential act through a formula of *general confession*, pronounced in the *first person singular*. Everyone confesses to God and to the brothers “that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do”. Yes, also by omission, or rather, by having neglected to do the good I could have done. Often we feel we are good because “I have done no harm to anyone”. In reality, it is not enough not to harm others; it is necessary to choose to do good by taking the opportunity to bear good witness that we are disciples of Jesus. It is good to emphasize that we confess to being sinners *both to God and to our brothers*; this helps us understand the dimension of sin that, while it separates us from God, divides us also from our brothers, and vice versa. Sin cuts: it cuts the relationship with God and it cuts the relationship with our brothers, the relationship in the family, in society, in the community: sin always cuts, separates, divides.

The words we say with our mouth are accompanied by the gesture of beating the breast, acknowledging that I have sinned precisely by my own fault, and not that of others. Indeed, it often happens that, out of fear or shame, we point the finger to accuse others. Confessing our own sins. I remember an anecdote, that an old missionary told me, of a woman who began with the mistakes of her husband; then she went on to recount those of her mother-in-law and then the sins of her neighbours. At a certain point, the confessor said to her, “But, madam, tell me: have you finished? Very good. You have finished with the sins of others. Now start to tell your own”! Tell your own sins!

After the confession of sin, we beg the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels and the Saints to pray to the Lord for us. In this too, the *Communion of Saints* is valuable: that is, the intercession of these “friends and models of life” (Preface of 1 November) supports us on our path towards full communion with God, when sin will be definitively annihilated.

Aside from the “I confess”, the Penitential Act can be performed with other formulas, for example: “Have mercy on us, O Lord. / For we have sinned against you. / Show us, O Lord, Your mercy. / And grant us Your salvation” (cf. *Psalms 123: 3; 85: 8; Jer 14: 20*). On Sunday in particular we can perform the blessing and the aspersion of water in memory of Baptism (cf. *OGMR*, 51), which cancels all sins. It is also possible, as a part of the Penitential Act, to sing the *Kyrie eléison*: with the ancient Greek expression, we acclaim the Lord – *Kyrios* – and implore His mercy (*ibid.* 52).

The Sacred Scripture offers us shining examples of “penitent” figures who, returning to themselves after having committed sin, find the courage to remove the mask and open themselves up to the grace that renews the heart. Let us think of the King David, and the words attributed to Him in the Psalm: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (51: 3). Think of the prodigal son who returns to the father; or the invocation of the publican: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (*Lk 18: 13*). Let us think also of Saint Peter, of Zacchaeus, of the Samaritan woman. Measuring oneself with the fragility of the clay of which we are moulded is an experience that strengthens us: while it makes us take stock of our weakness, it opens our heart to invoking the divine mercy that transforms and converts us. And this is what we do in the Penitential Act at the beginning of the Mass.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the scouts from Mesnil-le-Roi. At the beginning of this year, I hope that each one of you and your loved ones may be able increasingly to encounter the Lord, especially in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration. He comes to raise us up from our errors, to illuminate our lives and to give us His joy. May the Lord bless you.

English

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from Korea, Canada and the United States of America. May each of you, and your families, cherish the joy of this Christmas season, and draw near in prayer to the Prince of Peace who has come to dwell among us. God bless you all!

German

A cordial welcome to German-speaking pilgrims. Many figures in the Sacred Scriptures, and the Saints, are examples to us in recognizing our weakness and having the courage to confess to sins and to open ourselves to forgiveness and to God's mercy. In this New Year, may the Lord accompany us with His grace and blessing, and give us His peace. Happy New Year!

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Spain and Latin America. At the beginning of this New Year, I hope that it will be for you a time of peace and that you will be able to contemplate the embrace of the Lord's love and tenderness in your lives. I invite you to inner renewal, following the example of many figures from the Sacred Scripture, such as King David, Saint Peter, and the Samaritan woman; these, despite having offended God, were capable of asking forgiveness with humility and sincerity, and were able to experience His mercy which transforms and brings true joy.

God bless you. Many thanks.

Portuguese

Dearest Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, I greet you all heartily, in particular the faithful of the *Comunidade Católica Palavra Viva*, hoping that the light of the Saviour may always shine on your families and communities, revealing the tender and merciful face of the heavenly Father. Let us hold the Child Jesus in our arms and place ourselves at His service. He is the wellspring of love and serenity. May He bless you for a serene and happy New Year!

Arabic

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Egypt, Lebanon and the Middle East. Dear brothers and sisters, the Penitential Act we perform at the beginning of the Mass, namely, acknowledging our sins before God and our brothers, enables us to prepare ourselves inwardly to be worthy of celebrating the Holy Mystery. Those who confess their sins with humility and sincerity receive forgiveness and again find union with God and with brothers. May the Lord bless you all and accompany you on the journey of the New Year.

Polish

I cordially greet the Polish people at today's audience. I wish you all a happy New Year. For you, your families, your loved ones, for those who live in Poland and abroad, and for your whole country, it is a time of peace and of

fulfilled hopes, full of divine gifts and the protection of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God. May Christ, God of Strength, Prince of Peace, born in Bethlehem, fill your hearts with His presence and bless you. Jesus Christ be praised!

Italian

To all Italian-speaking pilgrims present in this first general audience of 2018, I offer warm wishes of hope and peace for the new year.

I am pleased to welcome the participants in the general Chapter of the Daughters of Mercy and the Cross, and I encourage you to promote your charism with a spirit of service and fidelity to the Church.

I greet the seminarians of the Institute of the Consolata Missions; the associative family of prayer and charity of Agripoli and parish groups, in particular those from Mozzo, from Belvedere di Tezze sul Brenta and from Sant'Arzenio.

I address a special thought to the young, the sick and newlyweds. In this New Year, I invite you to welcome and share every day God's tenderness. Dear young people, be messengers of Christ's love among your peers; dear people who are sick, find support in your suffering in God's caress; and you, dear newlyweds, be witnesses of the joy of the Sacrament of Marriage through your faithful and mutual love.
