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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.40 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, resuming his catechesis on the Holy Mass, focused on the theme "Liturgy of the Word: 1. Dialogue between God and His people" (cf. *Letter to the Hebrews* 1: 1-2).

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!

Today, let us continue the catechesis on the Holy Mass. After looking at the rites for the introduction of the Mass, let us now consider the Liturgy of the Word, which is a constitutive part because we gather together to listen to what God has done and still intends to do for us. It is an experience that takes place "live" and not by hearsay, because "When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God Himself speaks to His people, and Christ, present in His word, proclaims the Gospel" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 29, see Constitution on the

Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7: 33).

And how many times, while the Word of God is being read, one comments: “Look at him... Look at her... Look at the hat she’s wearing, it’s ridiculous...”. And they start making comments. Isn’t it true? Should they make comments while the Word of God is being read? [*answer: “No!”*]. No, because if you chatter with people you do not listen to the Word of God. When the Word of God in the Bible is being read – the first reading, the second, the responsorial Psalm and the Gospel – we must listen and open the heart, because it is God Himself Who speaks to us, and not think of other things or speak about other things. Do you understand? I will explain to you what happens in this Liturgy of the Word.

The pages of the Bible cease to be a written text and become a living word, pronounced by God. It is God Who, through the person who reads, speaks to us and challenges us, we who listen with faith. The Spirit, Who “spoke ... through the prophets” (Creed) and inspired the sacred authors, causes “the word of God ... to make what we here outwardly have its effect inwardly” (*Lectionary*, Introduction, 9). But to listen to the Word of God, it is necessary also to have an open heart, to receive the words in the heart. God speaks and we listen to Him, and then put into practice what we have heard. It is very important to listen. At times perhaps we do not understand well, because there are some readings that are a bit difficult. But God speaks to us all the same, in another way. [We must] remain silent and listen to the Word of God. Do not forget this. At Mass, when they begin the readings, we are listening to the Word of God.

We need to listen to it! It is in fact a matter of life, as we are reminded by the incisive expression that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (*Mt* 4: 4). The life that the Word of God gives us. In this sense, we speak of the Liturgy of the Word as the “table” the Lord prepares to nourish our spiritual life. The table of the liturgy is an abundant table, which draws largely from the treasures of the Bible (cf. *SC*, 51), both of the Old and New Testaments, as in them the unique and identical mystery of Christ is proclaimed (cf. *Lectionary*, Introduction, 5). Think of the richness of the biblical readings offered by the three Sunday cycles which, in the light of the Synoptic Gospels, accompany us during the liturgical year: a great richness. Here I wish to recall the importance of the Responsorial Psalm, whose function is to encourage meditation on what has been heard in the reading that precedes it. It is good for the Psalm to be enhanced by singing, at least the refrain (cf. *OGMR*, 61; *Lectionary*, Introduction, 19-22).

The liturgical proclamation of the same readings, with the hymns taken from Sacred Scripture, expresses and fosters ecclesial communion, accompanying the journey of each and every one of us. It can therefore be understood why some subjective choices, such as the omission of readings or their substitution with non-biblical texts, are forbidden. I heard that someone, if there is news, reads the newspaper, because it is the news of the day. No! The Word of God is the Word of God! We can read the newspaper later. But there, one reads the Word of God. It is the Lord Who speaks to us. Substituting that word with other things impoverishes and compromises the dialogue between God and His people in prayer. On the contrary, the dignity of the ambo and the use of the Lectionary, the availability of good readers and psalmists. We need to find good readers! Those who know how to read, not those who read [crippling the words] and we understand nothing. Like that. Good readers. One must prepare and rehearse before Mass to read well. And this creates an atmosphere of receptive silence.

We know that the word of the Lord is an indispensable aid so as not to lose ourselves, as is acknowledged well by the Psalmist who, addressing the Lord, confesses: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalms* 119, 105). How can we face our earthly pilgrimage, with its hardships and its trials, without being regularly nourished and enlightened by the Word of God that resonates in the liturgy?

Certainly, it is not enough to hear with the ears, without receiving in the heart the seed of the divine Word, enabling it to bear fruit. Let us recall the parable of the sower and the various results obtained depending on the type of terrain (cf. *Mk* 4: 14-20). The action of the Spirit, Who makes the response effective, needs hearts that let Him work and cultivate, so that what is heard in Mass may pass into everyday life, in accordance with the admonishment of the apostle James: “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (*James* 1: 22).

The Word of God makes a journey within us. We listen to it with the ears and it passes to the heart; it does not remain in the ears, it must go to the heart, and from the heart it passes to the hands, to good works. This is the journey that the Word of God makes: from the ears to the heart to the hands. Let us learn these things. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet Francophone pilgrims, especially young French people. Dear brothers, how can we face our pilgrimage on earth, without letting ourselves be nourished by the word of God that resounds in the liturgy? We ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to this Word and to put it into practice in our daily life. God bless you.

English

I greet English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from Australia and from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

German

I greet German-speaking pilgrims with affection. In the biblical texts God Himself speaks with us. We willingly welcome His Word, so that the seed the Lord puts into our hearts may grow and bear abundant fruit. God bless you all.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America; particularly the seminarians of the Minor Seminary of Ciudad Real, and participants in the annual Assembly of Diocesan Delegates for Communications Media in Spain. I invite you to welcome every day the nourishment and the light of the Word of God that resounds in the liturgy, putting it into practice with concrete works. God bless you. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

With cordial affection, I greet all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Brazil. May the Lord fill your hearts with a great love for His Word, so that you can place divine will at the centre of your life, like the Virgin Mary. May she who welcomed and incarnated the Word of God be your guide and comfort. May God's blessing descend upon you and your families.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arab-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East. Dear brothers and sisters, the action of the Spirit needs hearts that allow themselves to be worked and cultivated, so be "doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves". May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Brothers and sisters, by participating in the Holy Mass, try to be attentive listeners to the Word of God. May it form and transform you. May it model the life of your families, and in

particular inspire the education of children and young people. Announce the Word of God everywhere, do not be afraid to speak of God, of faith, of the Church. Confirm each other in faith, so as to faithfully persevere in the teaching of Jesus. I bless you heartily.

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking faithful.

I am pleased to welcome the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Religious of Jesus-Mary. I encourage you all to live the mission with authenticity, a spirit of service and a capacity for mediation.

I greet the workers of the Ideal Standard industrial complex in Roccasecca and the Italian Blood Donors' Association of Potenza. I also greet the schools and institutes of formation, especially those of St. Mary Help of Christians in Rome and of Jesus-Mary in Rome, hoping that the teaching offered will be rich in values, to form people who know how to make fruitful the talents God has entrusted to each person.

Finally, I address the young, the sick and newlyweds. Today we remember Saint John Bosco, father and teacher of youth. Dear young people, look to him as the exemplary educator. You, dear people who are sick, trust always in the example of Christ crucified. And you, dear newlyweds, turn to his intercession to assume your conjugal mission with generous effort.
