SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO
HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

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This morning's General Audience took place at 9.35 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 focused on the Liturgy of the Word: II. *Gospel and homily.*

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then made an appeal for the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, to be held tomorrow on the liturgical memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, and for the 23rd Winter Olympics which will commence on Friday 9 February in PyeongChang, South Korea.

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!

Let us continue with the catechesis on Holy Mass. We had arrived at the Readings.

The dialogue between God and His people, developed in the Liturgy of the Word of the Mass, reaches its peak in the proclamation of the Gospel. It is preceded by the singing of the Alleluia – or, during Lent, another acclamation – with which "the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel".[1] Just as the mysteries of Christ illuminate the entire Biblical revelation, so, in the Liturgy of the Word, the Gospel is the light for understanding the meaning of the biblical texts that precede it, both of the Old and of the New Testament. In fact, "Christ Himself is the centre and fullness of all the Scripture, as He is of the entire liturgy".[2] Jesus Christ is always at the centre, always.

This is why the liturgy distinguishes the Gospel from the other readings, and surrounds it with particular honour and veneration.[3] Indeed, its reading is reserved to the ordained minister, who ends by kissing the book; we listen standing and we make the sign of the Cross on the forehead, the mouth and the chest; the candles and incense honour Christ Who, through the Gospel reading, makes His effective word resonate. From these signs the assembly acknowledges the presence of Christ Who addresses to it the "good news" that converts and transforms. It is a direct discourse that takes place, as affirmed by the acclamations with which it responds to the proclamation "Glory to you, O Lord" and "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ". We stand to listen to the Gospel, but it is Christ Who speaks to us, there. And this is why we are attentive, because it is a direct conversation. It is the Lord Who speaks to us.

So, in the Mass we do not read the Gospel to know how things went, but we listen to the Gospel to be aware of what Jesus did and said once; and that Word is living, the Word of Jesus that is in the Gospel is living and arrives to my heart. This is why listening to the Gospel is so important, with an open heart, because it is the living Word. Saint Augustine writes that "the mouth of Christ is the Gospel. He reigns in heaven, but never ceases to speak on earth".[4] If it is true that in the liturgy "Christ is still proclaiming His Gospel",[5] it follows that, by participating in Mass, we must give Him an answer. We listen to the Gospel and we must give an answer in our life.

To make His message reach us, Christ also uses the word of the priest who, after the Gospel, pronounces the homily.[6] Strongly recommended by Vatican Council II as part of the same liturgy,[7] the homily is not a circumstantial speech, nor a catechesis like the one I am giving now. It is neither a conference nor a lesson. The homily is something else. What is a homily? It is the resumption of "a dialogue between God and His people",[8] so that it may find fulfilment in life. The authentic exegesis of the Gospel is our holy life! The Word of the Lord ends its path by becoming flesh in us, by being translated into words, as in Mary and in the Saints. Remember what I said to you last time: the Word of the Lord enters the ears, reaches the heart and goes to the hands, to good works. And the homily too follows the Word of the Lord and also makes this journey to help us, so that the Word of the Lord arrives at the hands, passing via the heart.

I have already considered the subject of the homily in the Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, in which I recall that the liturgical context "demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist".[9]

He who pronounces the homily must perform his ministry well – whoever preaches, the priest or the deacon or the bishop – offering a real service to all those who participate in the Mass, but also those who listen to it must do their part. First and foremost, they must pay attention, which means assuming the right inner predispositions, without subjective demands, knowing that every preacher has his gifts and his limits. While at times there is reason to be bored by a long, unfocused or incomprehensible homily, other times instead the obstacle is prejudice. And he who pronounces the homily must be aware that he is not doing something of his own, he is preaching, giving voice to Jesus, he is preaching the Word of Jesus. And the homily must be well prepared, and it must be brief, brief! A priest said to me that once he went to another city, where his parents lived, and the father had said to him "You know, I am happy, because my friends and I have found a church where there is Mass without the homily!". And how often we see that during the homily some people fall asleep, others chat, or go outside to smoke a cigarette. So, please, let it be brief, the homily, but let it also be well prepared. And how do you prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons and bishops? How do you prepare it? With prayer, with the study of the Word of God, and by giving a clear and brief summary, which must not exceed ten minutes, please.

In conclusion, we can say that in the Liturgy of the Word, through the Gospel and the homily, God engages in dialogue with His people, who listen to Him with attention and veneration and, at the same time, acknowledge that He is present and working. If, then, we listen to the “good news”, we will be converted and transformed by it, and capable of changing ourselves and the world. Why? Because the Good News, the Word of God which enters through the ears, goes to the heart and arrives at the hands, to do good works.

[1] *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 62.

[2] *Lectionary General Introduction*, 5.

[3] Cf *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 60 and 134.

[4] *Sermon* 85, 1: *PL* 38, 520; cf. *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, XXX, I: PL 35, 1632; CCL 36, 289.

[5] Vatican Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33.

[6] Cf *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 65-66; *Lectionary General Introduction*, 24-27.

[7] Cfr Vatican Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 52.

[8] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 137.

[9] *Ibid.*, 138.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am pleased to greet the pilgrims from France and the various Francophone countries, especially the young people and the leaders of the Institutes of Catholic Teaching of Gironde, accompanied by Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard. May the proclamation of the Gospel and the homily make the effective Word of Christ, which converts and transforms, resonate in our hearts. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from England, the Philippines and 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 am pleased to welcome brothers and sisters from German-speaking countries. In the liturgy Christ continues to proclaim the Gospel, and we, participating in the Holy Mass, must respond to Him. May the Lord help us to be, like the saints, the Gospel lived for our neighbours. God bless you and protect you.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, particularly the groups from Spain and Latin America. Contemplating the Virgin Mary, let us strive, like She did, to hear the Word of the Lord with a docile and simple heart, and thus be able to make it flesh in us by translating it into works of love and holiness. May the Lord bless you. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I greet the Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the seminarians of the Apostolic Administration São João Maria Vianney, accompanied by the Bishop. Dear friends, in your preparation for the ordained Ministry, gladly make the Bible the daily food of your dialogue with the Lord, for when you are sent to proclaim this divine Word, people find in your life the most eloquent testimony of its effectiveness. Thank you for your visit and pray for me.

Arabic

I greet the Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the seminarians of the *São João Maria Vianney* apostolic administration, accompanied by their bishop. Dear friends, in your preparation for the ordained ministry, gladly make the Bible the daily food of your dialogue with the Lord, so that when you are sent to proclaim this divine Word, people will find in your life the most eloquent testimony of its effectiveness. Thank you for your visit, and pray for me.

Polish

I cordially greet the Polish people present at this audience. By participating during Mass in the Liturgy of the Word, we always remember the missionary mandate entrusted by the Lord Jesus to the apostles and to each one of us: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (*Mk* 16: 15). Fortified by the Eucharist and the “Good News”, be credible witnesses of Christ in your families, in your communities, in your workplaces, in universities, and in both the daily events of your life, and the exceptional ones. I bless you from my heart.

Italian

I am pleased to welcome the delegation of the Lithuanian Episcopate, presided over by Msgr. Gintaras Grušas, archbishop of Vilnius; the participants in the study week for formators of seminarians, promoted by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross; the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Voluntary Secular Institute of Don Bosco. I hope that for all of you, your visit to the Eternal City may encourage you to deepen your awareness of the Word of God, in order to announce that Jesus is the Saviour.

I greet the Guardiagrele Project Group of “Open Doors”, accompanied by Msgr. Bruno Forte, archbishop of Chieti-Vasto; the parish groups and the managers and artists of the “Medrano” Circus and of the “Rony Rollert” Circus. I would also like to thank you for your work, a work of beauty; with your art, you express beauty, and with beauty you lift us all up higher, closer to God. Your work of beauty is good for us all, thank you very much!

I greet the representatives of the *Banco Farmaceutico* Foundation who, next Saturday, will collect medicines in Italian pharmacies for people in need.

I address a special thought to the young, the sick and the newlyweds. Next Sunday will be the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, the day on which World Day of the Sick will be held. Dear young people, seek to be providential for those who suffer; dear people who are sick, always feel supported by the prayer of the Church; and you, dear newlyweds, love life that is always sacred, even when it is marked by fragility and sickness.

Appeals

Appeal for the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking

Tomorrow, 8 February, liturgical memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, is the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. This year's theme is "Migration without trafficking. Yes to freedom! No to trafficking!" With few possibilities of using regular channels, many migrants decide to venture out by other ways, where often abuse of every type, exploitation and slavery await them. Criminal organizations, dedicated to human trafficking, use this migratory routes to hide their victims among migrants and refugees. I therefore invite you all, citizens and institutions, to join forces to prevent trafficking and to guarantee protection and assistance to victims. Let us pray, all of us, so that the Lord may convert the heart of traffickers – it is an ugly phrase, this, "traffickers in people" – and give the hope of regaining freedom to those who suffer as a result of this shameful scourge.

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Appeal for the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang

The day after tomorrow, Friday 9 February, the 23rd Winter Olympic Games will open in the city of PyeongChang in South Korea, in which 92 countries will participate.

The traditional Olympic truce this year acquires special importance: delegations from both Koreas will march together under a single flag and will compete as a single team. This fact makes us hope for a world in which conflicts are resolved peacefully with dialogue and mutual respect, as sport also teaches us to do.

I greet the International Olympic Committee, the athletes who will participate in the Games in PyeongChang, the authorities and the people of the Korean Peninsula. I accompany you all in prayer, as I reiterate the commitment of the Holy See to support any useful initiative in favour of peace and the encounter between peoples. May these Olympics be a great feast of friendship and sport! God bless you and keep you.