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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Announcement of trip to Dublin for the World Meeting of Families

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 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 continued his catechesis on the Holy Mass, focusing on the theme "Eucharistic Liturgy: IV. Communion" (*Jn* 6, 54-55).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then announced his trip to Dublin for the Ninth World Meeting of Families.

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!

And today is the first day of spring: happy spring! But what happens in spring? Plants bloom, trees blossom. I will ask you a question. Does a sick plant or tree bloom well? No! A tree, a plant that is not watered by the rain or artificially, can it flower well? No. And a tree or a plant whose roots have been removed, or which does not have

roots, can it bloom? No. But without roots can it flower? No! And this is a message: Christian life must be a life that must flourish in works of charity, in doing good. But if you do not have roots, you cannot bloom, and the root, who is it? Jesus! If you are not with Jesus, there, in the root, you will not bloom. If you do not water your life with prayer and the sacraments, will you have Christian flowers? No! Because prayer and the sacraments water the roots and our life flourishes. I hope that this spring may be for you a spring in bloom, and with an Easter in bloom. Flowering with good works, virtues, doing good to others. Remember this, this is a very nice saying from my country: "The blossom of the tree comes from what it has underground". Never cut the roots with Jesus.

And let us continue now with the catechesis on the Holy Mass. The celebration of Mass, the various moments of which we are going through, is ordered to Communion, that is, uniting with Jesus. Sacramental communion: not spiritual communion, which you can do at home by saying, "Jesus, I would like to receive you spiritually". No, sacramental communion, with the body and blood of Christ. We celebrate the Eucharist to nourish ourselves with Christ, Who gives us Himself both in the Word and in the Sacrament of the altar, to confirm us to Him. The Lord Himself says so: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them" (*Jn* 6: 56). Indeed, the gesture of Jesus, Who gave to the disciples His Body and Blood in the Last Supper, still continues today through the ministry of the priest and the deacon, ordinary ministers of the distribution to their brothers of the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation.

In the Mass, after breaking the consecrated Bread, that is, the body of Jesus, the priest shows it to the faithful, inviting them to participate in the Eucharistic banquet. We know the words that resound from the holy altar: "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb: Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world". Inspired by a passage of the Book of Revelation – "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (*Rev* 19: 9), "marriage" because Jesus is the Spouse of the Church – this invitation calls us to experience the intimate union with Christ, source of joy and of holiness. It is an invitation that causes us to rejoice and at the same time urges an examination of conscience illuminated by faith. If on the one hand, indeed, we see the distance that separates us from Christ's holiness, on the other we believe that His Blood is "shed ... for the remission of sins". We were all forgiven in baptism, and all of us have forgiven or will be forgiven each time we partake of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And do not forget: Jesus always forgives. Jesus never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. Considering the salvific value of this Blood, Saint Ambrose exclaims: "I who sin always, am always in need of medicine" (*De sacramentis*, 4, 28: *PL* 16, 446A). In this faith, we too turn our gaze to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and invoke Him: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed". We say this in every Mass.

Although it is we who move in procession to receive Communion, we go towards the altar in procession to receive Communion, it is actually Christ Who comes to us to assimilate us to Him. There is an encounter with Jesus! To be nourished by the Eucharist means to allow oneself be changed as we receive. Saint Augustine helps us to understand it, when he tells us about the light received in hearing Christ say: "I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me" (*Confessions* VII, 10, 16: *PL* 32, 742). Each time we receive Communion, we resemble Jesus more, we transform more into Jesus. Just as the bread and wine are converted into the Body and Blood of Christ, those who receive them with faith are transformed into a living Eucharist. To the priest who, distributing the Eucharist, says to you, "The Body of Christ"; you answer, "Amen", or rather, you acknowledge the grace and commitment that leads to becoming the Body of Christ. Because when you receive the Eucharist, you become the Body of Christ. This is beautiful, very beautiful. While it unites us with Christ, tearing us from our selfishness, Communion opens us and unites us to all those who are one in Him. This is the prodigy of Communion: we become what we receive!

The Church strongly desires that the faithful also receive the Body of the Lord with consecrated hosts in the same Mass; and the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is expressed with greater fullness if Holy Communion is made in the two forms, even though Catholic doctrine teaches that one whole Christ is received in one form (cf. *General Order of the Roman Missal*, 85; 281-282). According to the ecclesial practice, the faithful approach the Eucharist normally in a processional form, as we have said, and, standing with devotion or kneeling, as established by the Episcopal Conference, receive the sacrament in the mouth or, where permitted, in the hand, as preferred (cf. *General Order of the Roman Missal*, 160-161). After Communion, to keep the gift received in

our hearts, we are helped by silence, silent prayer. Prolong a little that moment of silence, speaking with Jesus in the heart helps us greatly, as does singing a psalm or a hymn of praise (cf. *General Order of the Roman Missal*, 88) that helps us to be with the Lord.

The Eucharistic Liturgy is concluded by the oration after Communion. In this, on behalf of everyone, the priest turns to God to thank Him for making us His guests and to ask that what has been received may transform our life. The Eucharist makes us strong to bear the fruits of good works for living as Christians. Today's prayer is significant, in which we ask the Lord "May the mysteries we have received, O Lord, bring us heavenly medicine, that they may purge all evil from our heart and strengthen us with eternal protection" (Roman Missal, Wednesday of the Fifth week of Lent). Let us partake of the Eucharist: receiving Jesus Who transforms us into Him makes us stronger. Very good and very great is the Lord!

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French speaking pilgrims, especially young people from Switzerland and France. As Easter approaches, I invite you to strengthen your fervour, including active participation in Mass and fraternal charity, so that the grace of the Resurrection may truly transform your lives. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from Wales, Ireland, Norway, Japan and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the Irish pilgrims accompanying the icon of the Ninth World Meeting of Families, to be celebrated in Dublin in August. With prayerful good wishes that this Lenten season will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

German

A warm welcome to German-speaking pilgrims. Among you I greet the many students present at this audience, in particular the students of the *Gymnasium Haus Overbach* of Jülich who celebrate the centenary of its foundation. Never forget: in the Holy Eucharist, the Lord is present - for you! God bless you all.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, particularly the groups from Spain and Latin America. I encourage frequent communion, making present the mystery of love that is enclosed in the Sacrament, so that unity with Christ and with His Church may be manifested in our daily actions and bear witness to our new life in Christ. Thank you

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking friends taking part in today's audience, thank you for your presence and above all for your prayers! I greet all of you, in particular the students, the professors and the relatives of the *Pedro Arrupe* and *Senhora da Boa Nova* Colleges, hoping that the pilgrimage to the tomb of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul may strengthen, in your hearts, your feeling and living in the Church, under the tender gaze of the Virgin Mother. May the Lord's Blessing descend upon you and your families.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, in the Eucharist Jesus comes to meet us to assimilate us; let us allow ourselves to be transformed by the Lord into a living Eucharist and recognize the grace and commitment that lead to becoming the Body of Christ. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, our participation in Holy Mass is full when we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Eucharistic communion. This is the deepest union with Christ. He gives himself to us sinners as food that heals, fills with holiness and allows us to live the life of God Himself. Take this food, so that you are filled with holiness! I bless you from the heart.

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking faithful.

I am pleased to welcome the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploermel, on the occasion of their General Chapter; the religious attending the USMI Training Course; members of the Focolare Movement, and parish groups, especially those of Viterbo and Sant'Andrea del Pizzone. May your pilgrimage to the See of Peter help you cultivate the wisdom that only God can give.

I greet participants in the Conference for the Families of the "*Caduti in teatro operativo nelle Missioni di supporto alla Pace*" ("Fallen in active service in Peace Missions") – they are heroes: heroes of the Fatherland and heroes of humanity! Thank you! – accompanied by the Military Ordinary for Italy, Msgr. Santo Marciànò; the National Federation of Mountain Catchment Area Consortia (FEDERBIM); the National Cooper Federation and student groups, especially those from Rome, Solofra and Prato. I hope you will carry out a joyful and generous service to the common good.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. We are coming to the end of the Lenten time of grace. Do not tire of asking for God's forgiveness in Confession, and in your sufferings join ever more to those of the cross of Christ, competing in forgiveness and mutual help.

Announcement of trip to Dublin for the World Meeting of Families

On the occasion of the upcoming World Meeting of Families, I intend to visit Dublin on 25 and 26 August this year. I thank the civil authorities, the bishops, the bishop of Dublin, and all those who collaborate in preparing this trip. Thank you!
