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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.20 a.m. in Saint 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 cycle of catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the theme "Your Kingdom come" (Bible passage: from the Gospel according to Matthew, 13: 31-21).

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 recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, the second invocation with which we address God is "Your Kingdom come" (*Mt* 6: 10). After praying that His name be hallowed, the believer expresses the desire that His Kingdom come in haste. This desire springs, so to speak, from the very heart of Christ, who began His preaching in Galilee proclaiming: "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (*Mk* 1,15). These words are not a threat at all; on the contrary, they are a happy announcement, a message of joy.

Jesus does not want to push people to convert by sowing the fear of God's imminent judgment or a sense of guilt for evil committed. Jesus does not proselytize: He simply announces. On the contrary, what He brings is the Good News of salvation, and starting from this He calls us to convert. Everyone is invited to believe in the "Gospel": the lordship of God brought close to His children. This is the Gospel: the lordship of God made close to His children. And Jesus proclaims this wonder, this grace: God, the Father, loves us, is near us and teaches us to walk on the path of holiness.

The signs of the coming of this Kingdom are many, and all positive. Jesus begins His ministry by taking care of the sick, both in body and in spirit, of those who experienced social exclusion –for example, lepers – and of sinners who were looked upon with disdain by all, even by those who were greater sinners than they were, but who feigned righteousness. And what did Jesus call them? "Hypocrites". Jesus Himself indicates these signs, the signs of the Kingdom of God: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (*Mt 11: 5*).

"Your Kingdom come!", the Christian repeats insistently when he prays to "our Father". Jesus came; but the world is still marked by sin, populated by so many people who suffer, by people who are not reconciled and do not forgive, by wars and by so many forms of exploitation; let us we think of the trafficking of children, for example. All these facts are proof that the victory of Christ has not yet been fully implemented: many men and women still live with a closed heart. It is above all in these situations that the second invocation of the Lord's Prayer emerges on the Christian's lips: "Your Kingdom come!" Which is like saying: "Father, we need you! Jesus, we need you, we need you to be everywhere and forever You are Lord in our midst!". "Your kingdom come, may You be among us".

Sometimes we ask ourselves: why is this Kingdom being realized so slowly? Jesus loves to speak of His victory with the language of the parables. For example, He says that the Kingdom of God is like a field where good wheat and weeds grow together: the worst mistake would be to want to intervene immediately eradicating from the world those that seem to us to be weeds. God is not like us, God has patience. It is not with violence that the Kingdom is established in the world: its style of propagation is meekness (cf. *Mt 13: 24-30*).

The Kingdom of God is certainly a great force, the greatest that there is, but not according to the criteria of the world; this is why it never seems to have an absolute majority. It is like the leaven that is kneaded in the flour: it seemingly disappears, yet it is precisely this that ferments the mass (cf. *Mt 13: 33*). Or it is like a grain of mustard, so small, almost invisible, but it carries within it the explosive force of nature, and once grown it becomes the greatest of all the trees in the orchard (cf. *Mt 13: 31-32*).

In this "destiny" of the Kingdom of God we can intuit the story of Jesus' life: He too was a meagre sign for His contemporaries, an event almost unknown to the official historians of the time. A "grain of wheat" as He defined Himself, Who dies in the earth but only in this way can "produce many seeds" (cf. *Jn 12: 24*). The symbol of the seed is eloquent: one day the peasant sinks it into the earth (a gesture that looks like a burial), and then, "night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how" (*Mk 4: 27*). A seed that sprouts is more the work of God than the man who sowed it (cf. *Mk 4: 27*). God always precedes us, God always surprises us. Thanks to Him, after the night of Good Friday there is a dawn of Resurrection capable of illuminating the whole world with hope.

"Your kingdom come!". Let us sow this word in the midst of our sins and failures. Let us give it to people who are defeated and bent by life, to those who have experienced more hatred than love, to those who have lived useless days without ever understanding why. Let us give it to those who have fought for justice, to all the martyrs of history, to those who have concluded that they have fought for nothing and that evil always dominates in this world. Then we will hear the Lord's prayer respond. Those words of hope will be repeated for the umpteenth time, the same ones that the Spirit has placed in the seal of all the Holy Scriptures: "Yes, I will come soon!": This is the Lord's answer. "I will come soon". Amen. And the Church of the Lord replies: "Come, Lord Jesus" (see *Rev 2: 20*). "Your Kingdom come" is like saying "Come, Lord Jesus". And Jesus says: "I will come soon". And Jesus comes, in His way, but every day. Let us have trust in this. And when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we always say: "Your Kingdom come", to feel in the heart: "Yes, yes, I will come, and I will come soon".

Thank you!

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet the pilgrims from French-speaking countries, especially the young people of France, Switzerland and Belgium!

During this Lent, which begins today, I invite you to pray and work so that the Kingdom of God may be established in our world and so that we may know how to discern the signs. I wish a good Lent to all and God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from England, Wales, India, the Philippines and the United States of America. May the Lenten journey we begin today bring us to Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in Christ our Redeemer!

German

With affection I greet the pilgrims from German-speaking countries. A special welcome to the *Franziskus-Chor* of Limburg and the *Minichor* of ministrants from Bruneck. Let us always open ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit. As His instruments we wish to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God, bringing the hope of the Gospel to our neighbours. A good Lent to you all!

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. In particular I greet the participants in the *World Meeting of Transporters and Entrepreneurs, on Climate Change, Human Trafficking, Technology and Transport*, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. May the study of *Laudato si'* help them to take meaningful steps of justice and solidarity. And I wish you all a happy beginning of the Lenten season, a time of conversion and mercy: may prayer, almsgiving and fasting help us to renew our Christian life, participating in the Pasch of the Lord. God bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

I cordially greet the school groups of Bragança, Cabeceiras de Basto, Lourinhã, Oeiras and Viseu, and also the faithful of the parishes of Moreira and Pouso Alegre. To you and to all the Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, I wish a fruitful Lenten journey that will allow you to find and follow Jesus more closely, to the point of being able to say, along with Saint Paul, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me". 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: "Your Kingdom come!". Let us sow this word in the midst of our sins and failures. Let us give it to those who are defeated and bent by life, and then we will hear the Lord's Prayer answer. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet all the Poles present here. We are beginning the time of Lent. The Ash Wednesday liturgy, especially the ritual of the imposition of the ashes on the head, helps us to understand our fleetingness, the need for penance, fasting and renunciation. Let us open our heart and our mind to understand the meaning of our life in the light of the mysteries of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. In my heart, I bless you and your loved ones.

Italian

I address a cordial greeting to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Marist Brothers of the Schools; the Daughters of the Church and the young people of the parish of Arquà Petrarca, undertaking Christian initiation.

I welcome the faithful from Bisignano, on the occasion of the blessing of the effigy of Saint Emile who is venerated in the local shrine.

I greet the Association "Welcome without Borders" of Matera; and school institutes, in particular those of Legnano and Corbetta.

I address a special thought to young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. Today, Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten journey. I hope that each of you may live this time in an authentic spirit of penitence and conversion, as a return to the Father, Who awaits us all with open arms to admit us to the most intimate communion with Him.
