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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in Saint Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis resumed his catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the phrase, "As we forgive those who trespass against us" (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 18: 21-22).

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!

Today we complete the catechesis on the fifth question of the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the expression "as we forgive those who trespass against us" (*Mt* 6: 12). We have seen that it is indeed man who is indebted before God: from Him we have received everything, in terms of nature and of grace. Our life was not only wanted, but was beloved by God. Truly there is no space for presumption when we bring our hands together in prayer. There exists no "self-made man" in the Church. We are all indebted to God and towards many people who have given us favourable conditions of life. Our identity is built on the basis of the good we have received. The first is life.

Those who pray learn to say "thank you". And many times we forget to say "thank you", we are selfish. Those who pray learn to say "thank you", and ask God to be benevolent with him and with her. As much as we may strive, there always remains an uncancellable debt to God, that we can never pay back: He loves us infinitely more than we love Him. And then, as much as we may strive to live according to Christian teachings, in our life there will always be something for which we must ask for forgiveness: let us think of the days spent idly, the moments in which rancour has occupied our hearts and so on. These are the experiences, unfortunately not rare, that make us implore: "Lord, Father, forgive us our trespasses". Let us ask for God's forgiveness in this way.

Come to think of it, the invocation could also be limited to this first part: it would be good. Instead Jesus reinforces it with a second expression that combines with the first. The vertical relationship of benevolence on the part of God is refracted and required to be translated into a new relationship that we experience with our brothers: a horizontal relationship. The good God invites us all to be good. The two parts of the invocation are tied together with a merciless conjunction: we ask the Lord to forgive our debts, our sins, “as” we forgive our friends, the people who live with us, our neighbours, the people who have not been good to us.

Every Christian knows that there exists for him the forgiveness of sins, this we all know: God forgives everything, and always forgives. When Jesus describes the fact of God to His disciples, He outlines it with expressions of tender mercy. He says that there is more joy in heaven for a sinner who repents, rather than for a crowd of righteous people who are not in need of conversion (see *Lk 15: 7-10*). Nothing in the Gospels suggests that God does not forgive the sins of those who are well disposed and who ask to be re-embraced.

But God’s grace, so abundant, is always demanding. Those who have received so much must learn to give so much too, and not to hold back only for themselves what they have received. Those who have received so much must learn to give so much. It is no coincidence that the Gospel of Matthew, immediately after giving the text of the Lord’s Prayer, among the seven expressions used, emphasizes precisely that of fraternal forgiveness: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (*Mt 6: 14-15*). This is important! I think: sometimes I have heard people say: “I will never forgive that person! I will never forgive what they did to me!” But if you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. You close the door. Let us think, ourselves, whether we are capable of forgiving, or if we do not forgive. A priest, when I was in the other diocese, told me in anguish that he had gone to give the last sacraments to an old woman who was on the point of death. The poor lady could not speak. And the priest said to her: “Madam, do you repent of your sins?” The lady said yes; she could not confess them but she said yes. It was enough. And then again: “Do you forgive others?” And the lady, on her deathbed said: “No”. The priest was distressed. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. Let us think, we who are here, whether we forgive or are able to forgive. “Father, I can’t do it, because those people did so many things to me”. But if you cannot do it, ask the Lord to give you the strength to do it: Lord, help me to forgive. Here we find the bond between love for God and love of neighbour. Love calls for love, forgiveness calls for forgiveness. Again in Matthew we find a very intense parable dedicated to fraternal forgiveness (see *18: 21-35*). Let us listen to it.

There was a servant who had contracted an enormous debt with his king: ten thousand talents! A sum impossible to pay back; I do not know what it would be today, but hundreds of millions. But the miracle occurred, and that servant received not merely an extension for repayment, but rather a full amnesty. An unexpected grace! But then that very servant, immediately afterwards, rages against his brother who owes him a hundred *denari* – a small sum – and, although this is a modest figure, he does not accept excuses or supplications. Therefore, in the end, the master calls him back and has him condemned. Because if you do not try to forgive, you will not be forgiven; if you do not try to love, you will not be loved either.

Jesus inserts the power of forgiveness into human relationships. In life, not everything is resolved with justice. No. Especially where we must put a barrier to evil, someone must love beyond what is necessary, to start again a story of grace. Evil knows its revenge, and if it is not interrupted it risks spreading and suffocating the whole world.

Jesus replaces the law of retaliation – what you did to me, I will do in turn to you – with the law of love: what God has done to me, I will give back to you! Let us think today, in this very beautiful Easter week, if we are able to forgive. And if we do not feel capable, we must ask the Lord to give us the grace to forgive, because knowing how to forgive is a grace.

God gives every Christian the grace to write a story of good in the lives of his brothers, especially those who have done something unpleasant and wrong. With a word, a hug, a smile, we can convey to others the most precious thing we have received. What is the precious thing we have received? Forgiveness, which we must be able to give to others.

At the end, the Holy Father addressed the following words to the English-speaking pilgrims present: "I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!"
