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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place 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 Acts of the Apostles, this time choosing the passage "He told him the Good News about Jesus" (Acts 8: 35). Philip and the "course" of the Gospel on new roads (*Acts of the Apostles* 8: 5-8).

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!

After the martyrdom of Stephen, the "course" of the Word of God seems to come to a standstill, due to the unleashing of "a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8: 1). As a result, the Apostles remain in Jerusalem, while many Christians dispersed in other places in Judea and Samaria.

In the Book of Acts, persecution appears to be the permanent state of life of the disciples, in accordance with what Jesus said: "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you". (Jn 15: 20). But persecution, instead of extinguishing the fire of evangelization, kindles it even more.

We have heard what the deacon Philip did: he begins to evangelize the cities of Samaria, and there are numerous signs of liberation and healing that accompany the proclamation of the Word. At this point the Holy Spirit marks a new stage in the journey of the Gospel: He drives Philip to meet a stranger with a heart open to

God. Philip gets up and leaves in haste and, on a deserted and dangerous road, meets a senior official of the Queen of Ethiopia, the administrator of her treasures. This man, a eunuch, having been in Jerusalem for worship, is returning to his country. He was a Jewish proselyte from Ethiopia. Sitting in a carriage, he reads the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, in particular the fourth song of the “servant of the Lord”.

Philip approaches the carriage and asks him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (*Acts* 8: 30). The Ethiopian replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (*Acts* 8: 31). That powerful man recognizes that he needs to be guided to understand the Word of God. He was an important banker, a minister of the economy; he had all the power of money, but he knew that without explanation he could not understand, he was humble.

And this dialogue between Philip and the Ethiopian makes us reflect also on the fact that it is not enough to read the Scripture; it is also necessary to understand its meaning, to find the “juice” beneath the “rind”, to draw from the Spirit Who inspires the reading. As Benedict XVI said at the beginning of the Synod on the Word of God, “exegesis, the true reading of Holy Scripture, is not only a literary phenomenon ... It is the movement of my existence” (*Meditation*, 6 October 2008). Entering into the Word of God is being willing to overcome one’s own limits so as to encounter God and conform oneself to Christ, Who is the living Word of the Father.

Who, therefore, is the protagonist of what the Ethiopian official was reading? Philip offers his interlocutor the key to understanding: that meek suffering servant, who does not react to evil with evil and who, although considered failed and sterile and finally removed, frees the people from iniquity and bears fruit for God, is precisely that Christ whom Philip and the whole Church proclaim! Who with the Pasch redeemed us all. Finally the Ethiopian recognizes Christ and asks for Baptism, and professes faith in the Lord Jesus. This is a beautiful tale, but what drove Philip to go to the desert to meet this man? Who drove Philip to approach the carriage? It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent of evangelization. “Father, I am going to evangelize” – “Yes, will you do?” – “Ah, I will proclaim the Gospel and say who Jesus is, I will try to convince people that Jesus is God”. My dear, this is not evangelization, if there is no Holy Spirit there is no evangelization. This can be proselytism, publicity... But evangelization is letting oneself be guided by the Holy Spirit, so it is He Who drives you to proclaim, to proclaim by witness, also by martyrdom, also with the word.

After making the Ethiopian to meet the Risen One – the Ethiopian meets the risen Jesus because he understands that prophecy – Philip disappears, the Spirit takes him and sends him to do something else. I said that the agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit, and what is the sign that you, a Christian, are an evangelizer? Joy. Also in martyrdom. And Philip, full of joy, went somewhere else to preach the Gospel.

May the Spirit turn the baptized into men and women who proclaim the Gospel to attract others not to themselves, but to Christ; who know how to make room for God’s action; who know how to make others free and responsible before the Lord.

Greetings in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Botswana, Australia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada, and the United States of America. In a particular way my greeting goes to the seminarians of the Pontifical North American College and their families gathered for the ordination to the Diaconate to be celebrated tomorrow. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Greetings in various languages

“Dear brothers and sisters”, said the Pope to Polish pilgrims, “yesterday the Extraordinary Missionary Month began. Celebrating this month will help us first of all to rediscover the missionary meaning of our following of Jesus Christ, faith received gratuitously as a gift in Baptism. In fact, all of us, ‘baptized and sent’, are called to be witnesses of Christ and followers of the missionaries who bring the Gospel to all the peoples of the world. May our prayer and concrete gestures of solidarity always accompany you! I bless you with all my heart”.

Among the Italians he greeted the participants in the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on Mahatma Gandhi; and the priests of the Pontifical International Missionary College of Saint Paul the Apostle in Rome.

Finally, addressing the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds, he reiterated that today we celebrate the memory of the Guardian Angels: “May their presence strengthen in you the certainty that God accompanies the journey of the life of each one of us”, he said. “May they support you in proclaiming and living the Gospel of Christ for a world renewed in the love of God”.
