



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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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 focused on his apostolic trip to Thailand and Japan, which came to an end yesterday evening (Bible reading. from the *Gospel according to Matthew*, 28: 16-20).

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!

Yesterday I returned from my apostolic journey to Thailand and Japan, a gift for which I am so grateful to the Lord. I wish to renew my gratitude to the authorities and bishops of these two countries, who invited me and welcomed me with great care, and above all to thank the Thai people and the Japanese people. This visit has increased my closeness to and affection for these peoples: God bless them with abundance of prosperity and peace.

Thailand is an ancient kingdom that has been greatly modernised. Meeting the *King, the Prime Minister and the other authorities*, I paid tribute to the rich spiritual and cultural tradition of the Thai people, the people of the "beautiful smile". The people there smile. I encouraged commitment to harmony between the different components of the nation, as well as to economic development for the benefit of all, and the healing the scourges of exploitation, especially of women and children. The Buddhist religion is an integral part of the history and life of this people, so I went to visit the *Supreme Patriarch of Buddhists*, continuing on the path of mutual respect initiated by my predecessors, so that compassion and brotherhood may grow in the world. In this sense,

the *ecumenical and interreligious meeting* that took place at the country's largest university was very significant.

The witness of the Church in Thailand also comes through works of service to the sick and the least among us. Among these, the *Saint Louis Hospital* excels; I visited the hospital to encourage the healthcare staff and to meet some patients. I also dedicated specific moments to *priests and consecrated persons*, to *bishops*, and also to *Jesuit confreres*. In Bangkok I celebrated Mass with all the *people of God* in the National Stadium and then with *young people* in the Cathedral. There we experienced that in the new family formed by Jesus Christ there are also the faces and voices of the Thai people.

I then went to Japan. When I arrived at the nunciature in Tokyo, I was welcomed by the *bishops* of the country, and we immediately shared the challenge of being pastors of a Church that is very small, but a bearer of living water, the Gospel of Jesus.

“*Protect all life*” was the motto of my visit to Japan, a country that bears the scars of the atomic bomb and for the whole world speaks for the fundamental right to life and peace. In *Nagasaki* and *Hiroshima* I prayed, I met some survivors and relatives of the victims, and I reiterated my firm condemnation of nuclear weapons and the hypocrisy of talking about peace by building and selling war devices. After that tragedy, Japan has shown an extraordinary capacity to fight for life; and it has done so even recently, after the triple disaster of 2011: the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant accident.

To protect life you have to love it, and today the serious threat, in more developed countries, is the loss of the meaning of living. The first victims of the void of the meaning of life are young people, so a meeting in Tokyo was dedicated to them. I listened to their questions and dreams; I encouraged them to oppose together all forms of bullying, and to overcome fear and narrow-mindedness by opening themselves to God's love, in prayer and service to others. I met other young people at the Sophia University, together with the academic community. This University, like all Catholic schools, is very much appreciated in Japan.

In Tokyo I had the opportunity to visit the Emperor Naruhito, to whom I renew the expression of my gratitude; and I met the authorities of the country with the diplomatic corps. I expressed my hope for a culture of encounter and dialogue, characterized by wisdom and a broad outlook. Remaining faithful to its religious and moral values, and open to the Gospel message, Japan can be a leading country for a more just and peaceful world and for harmony between man and the environment.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us entrust the peoples of Thailand and Japan to God's goodness and providence. Thank you.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially the groups from England, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. 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

The Pope greeted among French-speaking pilgrims the study group on relations with the Holy See of the French National Assembly.

Addressing Italian-speaking pilgrims, he said, “I would like to send my greetings and my closeness to the dear

Albanian people, who have suffered so much these days. Albania was the first country in Europe I wanted to visit. I am close to the victims, I pray for the dead, for the wounded, for the families. May the Lord bless this people whom I love so much".

He then recalled that last Saturday, in Tambaú, Brazil, the priest Donizetti Tavares de Lima was proclaimed Blessed, adding that he was "a pastor totally dedicated to his people, a witness to evangelical charity and a courageous defender of the poor. Priests, consecrated persons, but also the lay faithful can make their own the witness of faith of Blessed Donizetti, with consistency in life choices, inspired by the Gospel. Let us applaud the new Blessed!"

Finally, addressing the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds, he observed that next Sunday the Liturgical Season of Advent will begin. "It is my wish to you all that the expectation of the Saviour will fill your hearts with hope and find you joyful in service to those most in need".
