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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at in the Paul VI Hall, 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 Acts of the Apostles, focusing on the theme: "Paul received all who came to him and preached the kingdom of God ... with all boldness and without hindrance" (*Acts 28:30-31*). Paul's imprisonment in Rome and the fruitfulness of the proclamation (From the *Acts of the Apostles*, 28, 16.30-31).

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!

Today we conclude our catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles with Saint Paul's final missionary phase: Rome (cf. *Acts 28: 14*).

Paul's journey, which was one with that of the Gospel, is proof that man's journeys, if lived in faith, can become a space of transit for God's salvation, through the Word of faith which is an active leaven in history, capable of transforming situations and opening up ever new paths.

The arrival of Paul in the heart of the Empire concludes the account of the Acts of the Apostles, which does not end with the martyrdom of Paul, but with the abundant sowing of the Word. The end of Luke's account, centred

on the Gospel's journey in the world, contains and recapitulates all the dynamism of the Word of God, an unstoppable Word that wants to run in order to communicate salvation to all.

In Rome, Paul first of all meets his brothers and sisters in Christ, who welcome him and give him courage (cf. *Acts* 28: 15) and whose warm hospitality leads one to think how much his arrival was awaited and desired. He was then permitted to live on his own under *custodia militaris*, that is, with a soldier guarding him; he was under house arrest. Despite his condition as a prisoner, Paul could meet with notable Jews to explain why he was forced to appeal to Caesar and to speak to them about the kingdom of God. He tries to convince them regarding Jesus, starting out from the Scriptures and showing the continuity between the newness of Christ and the "hope of Israel" (*Acts* 28: 20). Paul recognizes himself as profoundly Jewish and sees in the Gospel he preaches, that is, in the proclamation of the dead and risen Christ, the fulfilment of the promises made to the chosen people.

After this first informal meeting in which the Jews are well disposed, a more official one follows during which, for an entire day, Paul announces the kingdom of God and tries to open his interlocutors to faith in Jesus, starting "from the law of Moses and from the Prophets" (*Acts* 28: 23). Since not all are convinced, he denounces the hardening of the heart of God's people, the cause of their condemnation (cf. *Is* 6: 9-10), and celebrates with passion the salvation of nations that show themselves to be sensitive to God and capable of listening to the word of the Gospel of life (cf. *Acts* 28: 28).

At this point in the narrative, Luke concludes his work by showing us not the death of Paul but the dynamism of his sermon, of a Word that "is not bound" (*2 Tim* 2: 9) – Paul does not have the freedom to move but is free to speak because the Word is not chained – it is a Word ready to be sown with full hands by the Apostle. Paul does this "with all frankness and without impediment" (*Acts* 28: 31), in a house where he welcomes those who want to receive the proclamation of the kingdom of God and to know Christ. This house open to all hearts in search is the image of the Church which, though persecuted, misunderstood and chained, never tires of welcoming with a motherly heart every man and woman to proclaim to them the love of the Father who made Himself visible in Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, at the end of this journey, lived together following the course of the Gospel throughout the world, may the Spirit revive in each one of us the call to be courageous and joyful evangelizers. May He also enable us, like Paul, to imbue our homes with the Gospel and to make them cenacles of fraternity, where we can welcome the living Christ, Who "comes to meet us in every man and in every age" (cf. *Second Preface of Advent*).

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially the groups from Finland and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Greetings in various languages

In Italian, addressing the young, the elderly, the sick and newly-weds, the Pope said: "Open your hearts to the needs of the Church and, following Jesus' example, stay close to your brothers".
