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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place at 9.30 in the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

In his address in Italian the Pope, continuing his catechesis on the Beatitudes, focused on the fifth: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (*Mt 5: 7*).

After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful. He then launched an appeal for the upcoming "24 Hours for the Lord" initiative (20 to 21 March 2020).

The general audience concluded with the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will look at the fifth Beatitude, which says: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*" (*Mt 5: 7*). In this Beatitude there is a particularity: it is the only one in which the cause and the fruit of happiness coincide, mercy. Those who show mercy will find mercy, they will be accorded mercy.

This theme of the reciprocity of forgiveness is not present only in this Beatitude, but it is recurrent in the Gospel. And how could it be otherwise? Mercy is the very heart of God! Jesus says: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (*Lk 6: 37*). Always the same reciprocity. And the Letter of James affirms that "mercy triumphs over judgment" (2: 13).

But it is above all in the Lord's Prayer that we pray: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (*Mt 6: 12*); and this question is the only one that is taken up again at the end: "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*; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2838).

There are two things that cannot be separated: forgiveness granted and forgiveness received. But many people find themselves difficulty, and are unable to forgive. Very often the harm suffered is so great that being able to forgive seems to be like scaling a very high mountain: an enormous effort, and one thinks, it can't be done, it can't be done. This fact of the reciprocity of mercy indicates that we need to turn the perspective around. By ourselves we are not able; it takes the grace of God, we must ask for it. Indeed, if the fifth Beatitude promises finding mercy and in the Lord's Prayer we ask for the remission of sins, it means that we are essentially debtors and we need to find mercy!

We are all in debt. All of us. To God, Who is so generous, and to our brothers. Every person knows he is not the father or mother he or she should be, the husband or wife, the brother or sister. We are all "in deficit" in life. And we are in need of mercy. We know that we too have done wrong, there is always something good that is missing, that we should have done.

But it is precisely this poverty of ours that becomes the force for forgiveness! We are debtors and if, as we heard at the beginning, we will be judged with the measure with which we measure others (cf. *Lk 6: 38*), then it is best for us to extend the measure and remit debts, forgive. Every person should remember they need to forgive, they are in need of forgiveness, and they need patience; this is the secret of mercy: *by forgiving, one is forgiven*. Because God precedes us and He is the first to forgive us (cf. *Rom 5: 8*). Receiving His forgiveness, we in turn become capable of forgiving. Thus one's own misery and one's own lack of justice become an opportunity to open oneself up to the kingdom of heaven, to a greater measure, the measure of God, Who is mercy.

Where does our mercy come from? Jesus told us: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (*Lk 6: 36*). The more one welcomes the love of the Father, the more one loves (cf. *CCC*, 2842). Mercy is not one dimension among others, but rather it is at the centre of Christian life: there is no Christianity without mercy. If all our Christianity does not lead us to mercy, we have taken the wrong path, because mercy is the only true destination of every spiritual journey. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of charity (cf. *CCC*, 1829).

I remember that this theme was chosen from the first Angelus that I had to say as Pope: mercy. And this has remained very much impressed on me, as a message that as Pope I should always have given, a message that must be given everyday: mercy. I remember that day I also had the somewhat "shameless" attitude of advertising a book on mercy, that had just been published by Cardinal Kasper. And that day I felt so strongly that this is the message I must give, as Bishop of Rome: mercy, mercy, please, forgive.

The mercy of God is our liberation and our happiness. We live on mercy and we cannot afford to be without mercy: it is the air we breathe. We are too poor to set conditions, we need to forgive, because we need to be forgiven. Thank you!

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media, as we continue on our Lenten journey towards Easter. Upon you and your families, I invoke the strength and peace that come from our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Greeting in Italian

I cordially greet the Italian-speaking faithful, with a special thought for the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds.

Tomorrow we will celebrate the Solemnity of Saint Joseph. In life, work, family, joy and sorrow he always sought and loved the Lord, meriting the praise of Scripture as a just and wise man. Always invoke him with confidence, especially in difficult times, and entrust your lives to this great Saint.

I join in the appeal of the Italian bishops who in this health emergency have promoted a moment of prayer for the whole country. Every family, every faithful, every religious community: all united spiritually tomorrow at 9 p.m. in the recitation of the Rosary, with the Mysteries of Light. I will accompany you from here. We are led to the luminous and transfigured face of Jesus Christ and His Heart by Mary, Mother of God, health of the sick, to whom we turn with the prayer of the Rosary, under the loving gaze of Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Holy Family and of our families. And we ask him to take special care of our family, our families, especially the sick and the people who are taking care of them: doctors, nurses, and volunteers, who risk their lives in this service.

Appeal of the Holy Father

The coming Friday and Saturday, 20 to 21 March, the initiative “24 Hours for the Lord” will take place. It is an important Lenten appointment for prayer and to approach the sacrament of reconciliation.

Unfortunately in Rome, Italy and other countries this initiative will not be able to take place in the usual forms because of the coronavirus emergency. However, in all other parts of the world, this beautiful tradition will continue. I encourage the faithful to approach God’s mercy in confession in a sincere manner and to pray especially for those who are sorely tried as a result of the pandemic.

Where it will not be possible to celebrate “24 Hours for the Lord”, I am sure that this penitential moment can be lived through personal prayer.