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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 focused on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, which occurs today, 25 March.

After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful. He then launched an appeal to join in today in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and to participate in the moment of prayer which will take place on Friday 27 March on the parvis of Saint Peter's Basilica.

The general audience concluded with the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Twenty-five years ago, on this very date of 25 March, which in the Church is the solemn feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, Saint John Paul II promulgated the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, on the value and inviolability of human life.

We have just heard the Gospel account of the Annunciation. With her "yes" given to the Angel, the Virgin receives the Word made flesh and accepts trustfully to care for Him. She accepts to become the mother of the Son of God. In this way, in Mary, God's encounter with man is realised.

The bond between the Annunciation and the "Gospel of life" is close and profound, as Saint John Paul emphasised in his Encyclical. Today, we find ourselves reiterating this teaching in the context of a pandemic that threatens human life and the global economy.

A situation that makes the words with which the Encyclical begins seem even more challenging: “The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus’ message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as ‘good news’ to the people of every age and culture” (1).

As in every proclamation of the Gospel, this too must first of all be witnessed. And I think with gratitude of the silent testimony of the many people who, in different ways, are doing their best to serve the sick, the elderly, the lonely and the destitute. They put the Gospel of life into practice, like Mary who, having accepted the angel’s announcement, went to help her cousin Elizabeth who was in need.

Indeed, the life that we are called to promote and defend is not an abstract concept, but always manifests itself in a person in the flesh: a newly conceived child, a poor outcast, a sick person who is alone and discouraged or in a terminal state, one who has lost his job or cannot find one, a rejected or ghettoized migrant... Life manifests itself tangibly in people.

Every human being is called by God to enjoy the fullness of life; and being entrusted to the maternal care of the Church, every threat to human dignity and life cannot but be felt in her heart, in her maternal womb. The defence of life for the Church is not an ideology, it is a reality, a human reality which involves all Christians, precisely because they are Christians and because they are human.

The attacks on people's dignity and life continue, unfortunately, even in this age of ours, which is the age of universal human rights; indeed, we are faced with new threats and new slavery, and legislation is not always in place to protect the weakest and most vulnerable human life.

The message of the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* is therefore more timely than ever. Beyond emergencies, such as the one we are experiencing, it is a matter of acting on the cultural and educational level to transmit to future generations an attitude of solidarity, care and acceptance, well aware that the culture of life is not the exclusive patrimony of Christians, but belongs to all those who, working to build fraternal relationships, recognise the value proper to each person, even when he or she is fragile and suffering.

Dear brothers and sisters, every human life, unique and unrepeatable, is of inestimable value. This must always be proclaimed anew, with the courage of speech and the courage of action. This calls for solidarity and fraternal love for the great human family and for every one of its members.

Therefore, with Saint John Paul II, who gave this Encyclical, alongside him I reiterate with renewed conviction the appeal he addressed to everyone twenty-five years ago: “Respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!” (Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, 5).

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!

Appeal of the Holy Father

Shortly, at midday, we Pastors of the various Christian communities, together with the faithful of the various denominations, will gather spiritually to invoke God with the recitation of the Our Father. Let us unite our voices

to beseech the Lord in these days of suffering, as the world is sorely tried by the pandemic. May the Lord, good and merciful, grant the concerted prayer of His children who, with trustful hope, turn to His omnipotence.

I reiterate to all my invitation to participate spiritually, through the media, in the moment of prayer at which I will preside the day after tomorrow, Friday, at 6 p.m., in front of Saint Peter's Basilica. The Word of God and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will be followed by my *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, associated with the plenary indulgence.
