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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 cycle of catechesis on prayer, focused on the theme "The mystery of Creation" (*Psalms* 8: 4-5, 10).

After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful.

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!

Let us continue the catechesis on prayer, focusing on the *mystery of Creation*. Life, the simple fact that we exist, opens the heart of the human person to prayer.

The first page of the Bible resembles a great hymn of thanks. The account of Creation is punctuated with refrains in which the goodness and beauty of all things that exist are continually reaffirmed. God calls into life with His word, and each thing enters into existence. With the word, He separates light from darkness, He alternates day and night, He alternates the seasons, He opens up a palette of colours with the variety of plants and animals. In this overflowing forest that rapidly defeats chaos, the human being finally appears. And this apparition causes an excess of exultation that amplifies satisfaction and joy: "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (*Gen* 1: 31). A good thing, but also beautiful: one sees all the beauty of all Creation!

The beauty and mystery of Creation generate in the heart of man and woman the first movement that stirs

prayers (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2566). Thus says the Psalm 8, which we heard in the beginning: “When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have fixed, what is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him?” (vv. 4-5). The man or woman in prayer contemplates the mystery of existence around them, they see the starry sky above - which astrophysics shows us today in all its immensity - and wonder what design of love there must be behind such a powerful work! And in this boundless vastness, what is man? “Frail”, almost nothing, says another Psalm (see 89: 48): a being that is born, a being that dies, a very fragile creature. Yet, in the whole universe, the human being is the only creature aware of such a profusion of beauty. A small being that is born, dies, is here today but not tomorrow, is the only one aware of this beauty. We are aware of this beauty!

The prayer of the human person is closely linked to the sentiment of *wonder*. The greatness of man and woman is infinitesimal in relation to the dimensions of the universe. Our greatest achievements seem to be very little... But we are nothing. In prayer a sentiment of mercy is overwhelmingly affirmed. Nothing exists by chance: the secret of the universe resides in a benevolent glance that catches our eyes. The Psalm affirms that we are made as little less than a god, crowned with glory and honour (see 8: 6). The relationship with God is the greatness of each human person: his or her enthronement. By nature we are almost nothing, small, but by vocation, by calling, we are children of the great King!

It is an experience that many of us have had. If the events of our life, with all its bitterness, at times risks suffocating the gift of prayer within us, it is enough to contemplate a starry sky, a sunset, a flower, to reignite the spark of thanksgiving. This experience is perhaps the basis of the first page of the Bible.

When the great biblical account of Creation was written, the people of Israel were not going through happy days. An enemy power had occupied the land; many had been deported, and now they found themselves enslaved in Mesopotamia. There was no homeland, no temple, no social and religious life, nothing.

And yet, just starting from the great story of Creation, someone began to find reasons to give thanks, to praise God for their existence. Prayer is the first force of hope. You pray and hope grows, it goes ahead. I would say that prayer opens the door to hope. There is hope, but with my prayer I open the door. Because men and women of prayer safeguard the basic truths; they are those who repeat, first of all to themselves and then to all others, that this life, despite all its fatigue and trials, despite its difficult days, is filled with a grace at which we marvel. And as such it must always be defended and protected.

Men and women who pray know that hope is stronger than discouragement. They believe that love is more powerful than death, and that it will surely triumph one day, be it in times and ways we do not know. Men and women of prayer bear the reflection of light on their faces: because even on the darkest days the sun does not cease to illuminate them. Prayer illuminates you: it illuminates your soul, it illuminates your heart, and it illuminates your face. Even in the darkest times, even in the times of greatest pain.

We are all bearers of joy. Have you thought of this? That you are a bearer of joy? Or do you prefer to bear bad news, things that bring sadness? We are all capable of bearing joy. This life is the gift that God has given us: and it is too short to be consumed in sadness, in bitterness. Let us praise God, content simply to exist. Let us look at the universe, let us look at the beauty and let us also look at our crosses and say: “But, you exist, you have made us this way, for you”. It is necessary to feel that restlessness in the heart that leads us to thank and to praise God. We are the children of the great King, of the Creator, capable of reading His signature in all creation; that creation that today we do not protect, but in that creation there is the signature of God who made it out of love. May the Lord make us understand this ever more deeply, and lead us to say “thank you”; and that “thank you” is a beautiful prayer.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. As we prepare to celebrate the Ascension of

the Lord, I invoke upon you and your families the peace and joy that come from the Risen Christ. May God bless you!

Greeting in Italian

I greet Italian-speaking faithful. The feast, now near, of the Ascension of the Lord, offers me an occasion to urge you all to be generous witnesses of the Risen Christ, well aware that He is always with us and sustains us along the way.

I address a special thought to the elderly, the young, the sick and the newlyweds. Jesus Christ, ascending into heaven, leaves a message and a programme for the whole Church: "Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (*Mt 28: 19-20*). Let it be your ideal and your commitment to make Christ's word of salvation known and bear witness to it in daily life. My blessing to you all!

Greeting in Polish

I cordially greet all Polish faithful. In these days we celebrate the centenary of the birth of Saint John Paul II. A pastor of great faith, he loved to entrust the Church and all humanity to God in prayer. By choosing the episcopal motto "Totus Tuus", he also showed that in difficult moments we must turn to the Mother of God, who can help us and intercede for us. May her life, built on profound, intense and trustful prayer, be an example to Christians today. I bless you from my heart.
