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General Audience

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

In his address in Italian, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on prayer, focusing on the theme: "The prayer of Moses" (*Ex 32: 11-14*).

After summarising in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful. He then launched an appeal on the occasion of the "Day of Conscience", held today.

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!

In our itinerary on the theme of prayer, we are realising that God never liked to have anything to do with those who prayed the "easy" way. And Moses was not a "weak" dialogue partner either, from the very first day of his vocation.

When God called him, Moses was in human terms a "failure". The Book of Exodus depicts him in the land of Midian as a fugitive. As a young man he had felt compassion for his people, and had aligned himself in defence of the oppressed. But he soon discovered that, despite his good intentions, it was not justice, but violence that came from his hands. His dreams of glory shattered, Moses was no longer a promising official, destined to rise rapidly in his career, but rather one who gambled away opportunities, and now grazed a flock that was not even his own. And it was precisely in the silence of the desert of Midian that God summoned Moses to the revelation of the burning bush: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (*Ex 3:6*).

Moses opposes God who speaks, who invites him to take care of the people of Israel once more with his fears and his objections: he is not worthy of that mission, he does not know the name of God, he will not be believed by the Israelites, he has a stammering tongue... so many other objections. The word that appears most frequently on Moses's lips, in every prayer he addresses to God, is the question: "Why?" Why have you sent me? Why do you want to free this people? Why? There is even a dramatic passage in the Pentateuch, where God reproaches Moses for his lack of trust, a lack that will prevent him from entering the promised land (cf. *Nm* 20:12).

With these fears, with this heart that often falters, how can Moses pray? Rather, Moses appears human like us. And this happens to us too: when we have doubts, how can we pray? It is not easy for us to pray. And it is because of his weakness, as well as his strength, that we are impressed. Entrusted by God to transmit the Law to his people, founder of divine worship, mediator of the highest mysteries, he will not for this reason cease to maintain close bonds of solidarity with his people, especially in the hour of temptation and sin. He was always attached to his people. Moses never forgets his people. And this is the greatness of pastors: not forgetting the people, not forgetting one's roots. And just as Paul says to his beloved young Bishop Timothy: "Remember your mother and your grandmother, your roots, your people". Moses is so friendly with God that he can speak with Him face to face (see *Ex* 33:11); and he will remain so friendly with other people that he feels mercy for their sins, for their temptations, for the sudden nostalgia that the exiles feel for the past, recalling when they were in Egypt.

Moses does not reject God, but nor does he reject his people. He is faithful to his flesh and blood, he is faithful to God's voice. Moses is not therefore an authoritarian and despotic leader; the Book of Numbers defines him rather as "a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (*Nm* 12:3). Despite his privileged status, Moses never ceased to belong to the numbers of the poor in spirit who live by trusting in God as the viaticum of their journey. He is a man of his people.

Thus, the way of praying most proper to Moses is through *intercession* (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2574). His faith in God is completely at one with his sense of fatherhood towards his people. Scripture habitually depicts him with his hands outstretched towards God, as if to form a bridge between heaven and earth with his own person. Even in the most difficult moments, even on the day when the people repudiate God and him as a guide and make themselves a golden calf, Moses does not feel like putting his people aside. They are my people. They are your people. They are my people. He does not reject either God or his people. And he says to God: "Ah, this people has committed a grave sin in making a god of gold for themselves! Now if you would only forgive their sin! But if you will not" - if you do not forgive this sin - "then blot me out of the book that you have written" (*Ex* 32:31-32). Moses does not barter his people. He is the bridge, the one intercessor. Both of them, the people and God, and he is in the middle. He does not sell out his people to advance his career. He does not climb the ladder, he is an intercessor: for his people, for his flesh and blood, for his history, for his people and for the God who called him. He is the bridge. What a beautiful example for all pastors who must be "bridges". This is why they are called *pontifex*, bridges. Pastors are the bridges between the people, to whom they belong, and God, to whom they belong by vocation. This is what Moses is. "If you would only forgive their sin! But if you will not, then blot me out of the book that you have written. I do not want to get ahead at the expense of my people".

And this is the prayer that true believers cultivate in their spiritual life. Even if they experience the shortcomings of people and their distance from God, in prayer they do not condemn them, they do not reject them. The intercessory attitude is proper to the saints who, in imitation of Jesus, are "bridges" between God and His people. Moses, in this sense, was the first great prophet of Jesus, our advocate and intercessor (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2577). And today, too, Jesus is the *pontifex*, He is the bridge between us and the Father. And Jesus intercedes for us, He shows the Father the wounds that are the price of our salvation, and He intercedes. And Moses is the figure of Jesus who today prays for us, intercedes for us.

Moses urges us to pray with the same ardour as Jesus, to intercede for the world, to remember that despite all its frailties, it still belongs to God. Everyone belongs to God. The worst sinners, the wickedest people, the most corrupt leaders, they are children of God, and Jesus feels this and intercedes for everyone. And the world lives and thrives thanks to the blessing of the righteous, to the prayer for mercy, this prayer for mercy that the saint, the righteous, the intercessor, the priest, the bishop, the Pope, the layperson, any baptised person incessantly

raises up for humanity, in every place and time in history. Let us think of Moses, the intercessor. And when we want to condemn someone and we become angry inside ... to get angry is good it can be healthy - while to condemn does no good, let us intercede for him or her; this will help us a lot.

Appeal of the Holy Father

Today is the "Day of Conscience", inspired by the witness of the Portuguese diplomat Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who around 80 years ago decided to follow the voice of his conscience and saved the lives of thousands of Jews and other persecuted peoples. May freedom of conscience be respected always and everywhere, and may every Christian give the example of the consistency of an upright conscience enlightened by the Word of God.
