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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place at 9.15 in the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

During his address in Italian, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on prayer, focusing on the theme "Praying and the Trinity" (Bible reading: *Rm* 8:14-15, 26-27).

After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful. He then launched an appeal to the international community regarding the situation in Myanmar, and invited the faithful to pray for his upcoming Apostolic Journey in Iraq.

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 journey of catechesis on prayer, today and next week we will see how, thanks to Jesus Christ, prayer opens us up to the Trinity –to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - to the immense sea of God who is Love. It is Jesus who opened up Heaven to us and projected us into a relationship with God. It was he who did this: he opened up to us this relationship with the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what the Apostle John affirms at the conclusion of the prologue of his Gospel: "No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known" (*Jn* 1:18). Jesus revealed the identity to us, this identity of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. We really did not know how to pray: what words, what feelings and what language were appropriate for God. In that request the disciples addressed to the Master, which we have often recalled in the course of these catecheses, there is all of humanity's fumbling, repeated attempts, often unsuccessful, to address the Creator: "Lord, teach us to pray" (*Lk* 11:1).

Not all prayers are equal, and not all are convenient: the Bible itself attests to the negative outcome of many prayers, which are rejected. Perhaps God at times is not content with our prayers and we are not even aware of this. God looks at the hands of those who pray: to make them pure it is not necessary to wash them; if anything, one must refrain from evil acts. Saint Francis prayed: «Nullu homo ène dignu te mentovare», that is, “no man is worthy of naming you” (*Canticle of the Sun*).

But perhaps the most moving acknowledgment of the poverty of our prayer came from the lips of the Roman centurion who one day begged Jesus to heal his sick servant (cf. *Mt* 8:5-13). He felt totally inadequate: he was not a Jew, he was an officer in the detested occupying army. But his concern for his servant emboldens him, and he says: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed” (v. 8). It is the phrase we also repeat in every Eucharistic liturgy. To dialogue with God is a grace: we are not worthy of it, we have no rights to claim, we “limp” with every word and every thought... But Jesus is the door that opens us to this dialogue with God.

Why should humanity be loved by God? There are no obvious reasons, there is no proportion... So much so that most mythologies do not contemplate the possibility of a god who cares about human affairs; on the contrary, they are considered bothersome and boring, entirely negligible. Remember God’s phrase to his people, repeated in Deuteronomy: “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us?” This closeness of God is the revelation! Some philosophers say that God can only think of himself. If anything, it is we humans who try to convince the deity and be pleasing to his eyes. Hence the duty of “religion”, with the procession of sacrifices and devotions to be offered again and again to ingratiate ourselves with a mute God, an indifferent God. There is no dialogue. It was only Jesus, it was only the revelation of God to Moses before Jesus, when God presented himself; it was only the Bible that opened us up to dialogue with God. Remember: “What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as ours?”. This is God’s closeness, that opens us up to dialogue with him.

A God who loves humanity: we would never have had the courage to believe in him, had we not known Jesus. The knowledge of Jesus made us understand this, it let this be revealed to us. It is the scandal – it is a scandal! - that we find inscribed in the parable of the merciful father, or in that of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep (cf. *Lk* 15). We would not have been able to conceive or even comprehend such stories if we had not met Jesus. What kind of God is prepared to die for people? Which one? What kind of God loves always and patiently, without demanding to be loved in return? What God accepts the tremendous lack of gratitude of a son who asks for his inheritance in advance and leaves home, squandering everything? (cf. *Lk* 15:12-13).

It is Jesus who reveals God’s heart. Thus Jesus tells us through his life the extent to which God is a Father. *Tam Pater nemo*: No one is Father like he is. The paternity that is closeness, compassion and tenderness. Do not forget these three words, that are God’s style: closeness, compassion and tenderness. It is his way of expressing his paternity towards us. It is difficult for us to imagine from afar the love with which the Holy Trinity is filled, and the depth of the reciprocal benevolence that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Eastern icons offer us a glimpse of this mystery that is the origin and joy of the whole universe.

Above all, it was beyond us to believe that this divine love would expand, landing on our human shore: we are the recipients of a love that has no equal on earth. The Catechism explains: “The sacred humanity of Jesus is therefore the way by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to God our Father” (no. 2664). And this is the grace of our faith. We really could not have hoped for a higher vocation: the humanity of Jesus – God who came close to us in Jesus - made available to us the very life of the Trinity, and threw wide open this door of the mystery of the love of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Greeting in English

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. May our Lenten journey bring us to the joy of Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of

our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Appeals of the Holy Father

Sad news of bloody clashes and loss of life continue to arrive from Myanmar. I would like to draw the attention of the authorities involved to the fact that dialogue prevails over repression and harmony over discord. I also appeal to the international community to ensure that the aspirations of the people of Myanmar are not stifled by violence. May the young people of that beloved land be granted the hope of a future where hatred and injustice make way for encounter and reconciliation. Finally, I repeat the wish I expressed a month ago: that the path towards democracy taken in recent years by Myanmar may be resumed through the concrete gesture of the release of the various political leaders imprisoned (see *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 8 February 2021).

The day after tomorrow, God willing, I will go to Iraq for a three-day pilgrimage. For a long time I have wanted to meet those people who have suffered so much; to meet that martyred Church in the land of Abraham. Together with the other religious leaders, we shall also take another step forward in brotherhood among believers. I ask you to accompany this apostolic journey with your prayers, so that it may unfold in the best possible way and bear the hoped-for fruits. The Iraqi people are waiting for us; they awaited Saint John Paul II, who was not permitted to go. One cannot disappoint a people for the second time. Let us pray that this journey will be a good one.
