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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in the Paul VI Hall. In his address in Italian, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, focusing on the theme: "Christ sets us free" (Bible reading: *Gal* 4: 4-5, 5 :1).

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!

In his Letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul wrote immortal words on Christian freedom. Today, we will reflect on this topic.

Freedom is a treasure that is truly appreciated only when it is lost. For many of us who are used to being free, it often appears to be an acquired right rather than a gift and a legacy to be preserved. How many misunderstandings there are around the topic of freedom, and how many different views have clashed over the centuries!

In the case of the Galatians, the Apostle could not bear that those Christians, after having known and accepted the truth of Christ, allowed themselves to be attracted to deceptive proposals, moving from freedom to slavery: from the liberating presence of Jesus to slavery to sin, from legalism, and so forth. He therefore invites the Christians to remain firm in the freedom they had received with baptism, without allowing themselves to be put once again under the "yoke of slavery" (*Gal* 5:1). Paul is rightly jealous of this freedom. He is aware that some

“false brothers” have crept into the community to “spy on” – this is what he says – “our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (*Gal 2:4*). And he cannot tolerate this. A proclamation that would preclude freedom in Christ would never be evangelical. You can never force in the name of Jesus; you cannot make anyone a slave in the name of Jesus who makes us free.

But above all, Saint Paul’s teaching about freedom is positive. The Apostle proposes the teaching of Jesus that we find in the Gospel of John as well: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (8:31-32). Therefore, the call is above all to remain in Jesus, the source of truth who makes us free. Christian freedom, therefore, is founded on two fundamental pillars: first, the grace of the Lord Jesus; second, the truth that Christ reveals to us and which is He himself.

First of all, it is a *gift from the Lord*. The freedom that the Galatians had received – and we like them – is the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle concentrates his entire proclamation on Christ, who had liberated him from the bonds of his past life: only from Him do the fruits of the new life according to the Spirit flow. In fact, the truest freedom, that from slavery to sin, flows from the Cross of Christ. God placed right there, where Jesus allowed himself to be nailed, the source of the radical liberation of the human person. This never ceases to amaze us: that the place where we are stripped of every freedom, that is, death, might become the source of freedom. But this is the mystery of God’s love! Jesus himself had proclaimed it when he said: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (*Jn 10:17-18*). Jesus achieves complete freedom by giving himself up to death; He knows that only in this way could he obtain life for everyone.

Paul had experienced first-hand this mystery of love. For this reason, he says to the Galatians, with an extremely bold expression: “I have been crucified with Christ” (*Gal 2:19*). In that act of supreme union with the Lord, he knew he had received the greatest gift of his life: freedom. On the Cross, in fact, he had nailed “his flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). We understand how much faith filled the Apostle, how great was his intimacy with Jesus. And while, on the one hand, we know this is what we are missing, on the other hand, the Apostle’s testimony encourages us.

The second pillar of freedom is *the truth*. In this case as well, it is necessary to remember that the truth of faith is not an abstract theory, but the reality of the living Christ, who touches the daily and overall meaning of personal life. Freedom makes free to the extent to which it transforms a person’s life and directs it toward the good. So as to be truly free, we not only need to know ourselves on the psychological level, but above all to activate the truth in ourselves on a more profound level — and there, in our heart, open ourselves to the grace of Christ. Truth must disturb us, it must constantly question us, so that we might always plunge deeper into what we really are. In this way we will discover that the journey of truth and freedom is an arduous one that lasts a lifetime. It is a journey on which the Love that comes from the Cross guides and sustains us: the Love that reveals truth to us and grants us freedom. This is the way to happiness.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!
