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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in the Paul VI Hall.

In his address in Italian the Pope, returning to his catechesis on old age, focused on the theme: "I go to prepare a place for you". Old age, a time projected towards fulfilment (Bible reading: *Jn* 14: 1-3).

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

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!

We are now at the last catechesis dedicated to old age. Today we enter into the moving intimacy of Jesus' farewell to his followers, amply recounted in the Gospel of John. The parting discourse begins with words of consolation and promise: "Let not your hearts be troubled" (*Jn* 14:1). "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (14:3). They are beautiful, these words of the Lord.

Shortly beforehand, Jesus had said to Peter, "You shall follow afterward" (13:36), reminding him of the passage through the fragility of his faith. The time of life that remains to the disciples will be, inevitably, a passage through the fragility of witness and through the challenges of brotherhood. But it will also be a passage through the exciting blessings of faith: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these he will do" (14:12). Think what a promise this is! I do not know if we think of it fully, if we believe in it fully! I don't know, at times I think not.

Old age is the fitting time for the moving and joyful witness of expectation. The elderly man and woman are waiting, waiting for an encounter. In old age the works of faith, which bring us and others closer to the Kingdom of God, are by now beyond the power of the energy, words, and impulses of youth and maturity. But precisely in this way they make the promise of the true destination of life even more transparent. And what is the true destination of life? A place at the table with God, in the world of God. It would be interesting to see whether in the local Churches there is any specific reference intended to revitalize this special ministry of awaiting the Lord – it is a ministry, the ministry of awaiting the Lord – encouraging individual charisms and community qualities of the elderly person.

An old age that is consumed in the dejection of missed opportunities brings despondency to oneself and to others. Instead, old age lived with gentleness, lived with respect for real life, definitively dissolves the misconception of a Church that adapts to the worldly condition, thinking that by so doing it can definitively govern its perfection and fulfilment. When we free ourselves from this presumption, the time of aging that God grants us is already in itself one of those "greater" works Jesus speaks of. In effect, it is a task that Jesus was not given to fulfil: his death, his resurrection and his ascent to heaven made it possible for us! Let us remember that "time is superior to space". It is the law of initiation. Our life is not made to be wrapped up in itself, in an imaginary earthly perfection: it is destined to go beyond, through the passage of death – because death *is* a passage. Indeed, our stable place, our destination is not here, it is beside the Lord, where he dwells forever.

Here, on earth, the process of our "novitiate" begins: we are apprentices of life, who – amid a thousand difficulties – learn to appreciate God's gift, honouring the responsibility of sharing it and making it bear fruit for everyone. The time of life on earth is the grace of this passage. The conceit of stopping time – of wanting eternal youth, unlimited wellbeing, absolute power – is not only impossible, it is delusional.

Our existence on earth is the time of the initiation of life: it is life, but one that leads you towards a fuller life, the initiation of the fuller one; a life which finds fulfilment only in God. We are imperfect from the very beginning, and we remain imperfect up to the end. In the fulfilment of God's promise, the relationship is inverted: the space of God, which Jesus prepares for us with the utmost care, is superior to the time of our mortal life. Hence: old age brings closer the hope of this fulfilment. Old age knows definitively, by now, the meaning of time and the limitations of the place in which we live our initiation. This is why old age is wise: the elderly are wise for this reason. This is why it is credible when it invites us to rejoice in the passing of time: it is not a threat, it is a promise. Old age is noble, it does not need to beautify itself to show its nobility. Perhaps the disguise comes when nobility is lacking. Old age is credible when it invites one to rejoice in the passing of time: but time passes … Yes, but this is not a threat, it is a promise. The old age that rediscovers the depth of the gaze of faith is not conservative by nature, as they say! God's world is an infinite space, in which the passage of time no longer carries any weight. And it was precisely at the Last Supper that Jesus projected himself towards this goal, when he said to his disciples: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (*Mt* 26:29). He went beyond. In our preaching, Paradise is often rightly full of beatitude, of light, of love. Perhaps it lacks a little life. Jesus, in the parables, spoke of the kingdom of God by putting more life into it. Are we no longer capable of this? The life that continues…

Dear brothers and sisters, old age, lived in the expectation of the Lord, can become the fulfilled "apologia" of faith, which gives grounds, for everyone, for our hope for all (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15). Because old age renders Jesus' promise transparent, projecting towards the Holy City of which the Book of Revelation speaks (chapters 21-22). Old age is the phase in life most suited to spreading the joyful news that life is the initiation to a final fulfilment. The elderly are a promise, a witness of promise. And *the best is yet to come*. The best is yet to come: it is like the message of elderly believers, the best is yet to come. May God grant us all an old age capable of this! Thank you.

<u>Greeting in English</u>

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience. Upon you and your families, I

invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!