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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in Saint Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on *Discernment*, focusing on the theme: "The elements of discernment. Desire" (Bible reading: *Jn* 5: 2, 5-9).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful in attendance. He then made an appeal and an invitation to prayer for Ukraine.

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 these catecheses on discernment we are reviewing the elements of discernment. After prayer, one element, and self-knowledge, another element, that is, praying and knowing oneself, today I would like to talk about another indispensable, so to speak, "ingredient": today I would like to talk about *desire*. In fact, discernment is a form of searching, and searching always stems from something we lack but somehow know, that we intuit.

What kind of knowledge is this? Spiritual teachers refer to it by the term "desire", which, at root, is a nostalgia for fullness that never finds full fulfilment, and is the sign of God's presence in us. Desire is not the craving of the moment, no. The Italian word, *desiderio*, comes from a very beautiful Latin term, this is curious: *de-sidus*, literally "the lack of the star". Desire is the lack of a lodestar, the lack of the reference point that orients the path of life; it evokes a suffering, a lack, and at the same time a tension to reach the good that we miss. Desire, then, is the compass to understand where I am and where I am going, or rather it is the compass to understand if I am still

or if I am moving; a person who never desires is a person who is static, perhaps ill, almost dead. It is the compass to know if I am moving or if I am standing still. And how is it possible to recognize it?

Let us think, a sincere desire knows how to touch deeply the chords of our being, which is why it is not extinguished in the face of difficulties or setbacks. It is like when we are thirsty: if we do not find something to drink, we do not give up; on the contrary, the yearning increasingly occupies our thoughts and actions, until we become willing to make any sacrifice in order to quench it, almost obsessed. Obstacles and failures do not stifle the desire, no; on the contrary, they make it even more alive in us.

Unlike a momentary craving or emotion, desire lasts through time, even a long time, and tends to materialize. If, for example, a young person wishes to become a doctor, he or she will have to embark on a course of study and work that will occupy several years of his or her life, and consequently will have to set *limits*, say “no”, to say “no”, first of all to other courses of study, but also to possible diversions and distractions, especially during the most intense periods of study. However, the desire to give life a direction and to reach that goal – to become a doctor was the example – enables him or her to overcome these difficulties. Desire makes you strong, it makes you courageous, it makes you keep going forward, because you want to arrive at that: “I desire that”.

In effect, a value becomes beautiful and more easily achievable when it is *attractive*. As some have said, “more important than being good is having the desire to become good”. Being good is something attractive, we all want to be good, but do we have the wish to become good?

It is striking that Jesus, before performing a miracle, often questions the person about their desire: “Do you want to be healed?”. And at times this question seems out of place, it is clear the person is sick! For example, when he meets the paralytic in the pool of Bethesda, who had been there for many years and never managed to seize the right moment for getting into the water, Jesus asks him: “Do you want to be well?” (*Jn* 5:6). But how come? In reality, the paralytic’s answer reveals a series of strange resistances to healing, which do not relate only to him. Jesus’ question was an invitation to bring clarity to his heart, to welcome a possible leap forward: to no longer think of himself and his own life “as a paralytic”, transported by others. But the man on the bed does not seem to be so convinced of this. *By engaging in dialogue with the Lord, we learn to understand what we truly want* from life. This paralytic is the typical example of those who say “Yes, yes, I want, I want, I want”, but then “I don’t want, I don’t want, I don’t want, I won’t do anything”. Wanting to do something becomes like an illusion and one does not take the step to do it. Those people who want and don’t want. This is bad, and that sick man, there for thirty-eight years, but always grumbling; “No, you know, Lord, but you know when the waters move – that is the moment of the miracle – you know, someone stronger than me comes along, they enter, and I get there too late”, and he complains and laments. But beware, because complaints are a poison, a poison to the soul, a poison to life, because they prevent the desire to go on from growing. Beware of complaints. When we complain in the family, married couples complain, one complains about the other, children about their father, priests about the bishop, or bishops about many other things... No, if you find yourself grumbling, beware, it is almost a sin, because stops desire from growing.

Often it is indeed desire that makes the difference between a successful, coherent and lasting project, and the thousands of wishes and good intentions with which, as they say, “hell is paved with”: “Yes, I would like, I would like, I would like...”, but you do nothing. The era in which we live seems to promote the maximum freedom of choice, but at the same time it *atrophies desire*, you want to be satisfied continually, which is mostly reduced to the desire of the moment. And we must be careful not to atrophy desire. We are bombarded by a thousand proposals, projects, possibilities, which risk distracting us and not permitting us to calmly evaluate what we really want. Many times, many times, we find people, think about young people for example, with their telephone in their hand, looking at it... “But do you stop to think?” – “No”. Always turned outwards, towards the other. Desire cannot grow in this way, you live in the moment, satiated in the moment, and desire does not grow.

Many people suffer because they do not know what they want from their lives, many of them; they have probably never got in touch with their deepest desire, they have never known: “What do you want from your life?” – “I don’t know”. Hence the risk of passing one’s existence between attempts and expedients of various kinds, never getting anywhere, and wasting precious opportunities. And so certain changes, though desired in theory, when

the opportunity arises are never implemented, the strong desire to pursue something is lacking.

If the Lord were to ask us, today, for example, any one of us, the question he asked the blind man in Jericho: "What do you want me to do for you?" (*Mk 10:51*) – let us think that the Lord today asks each one of us this: "What do you want me to do for you?" – how would we answer? Perhaps we could finally ask him to help us know our deepest desire, that God himself has placed in our heart: "Lord, may I know my desires, may I be a woman, a man of great desires"; perhaps the Lord will give us the strength to make it come true. It is an immense grace, the basis of all the others: to allow the Lord, as in the Gospel, to work miracles for us: "Give us desire and make it grow, Lord".

Because he too has a great desire for us: to make us share in his fullness of life. Thank you.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Ghana, Vietnam and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of Christ our Lord. God bless you!

Appeal of the Holy Father

In these days my heart is always with the Ukrainian people, especially the inhabitants of those places where the bombardments have been raging. I carry within me their pain and, by the intercession of the Holy Mother of God, I present it in prayer to the Lord. He always listens to the cry of the poor who invoke him: may his Spirit transform the hearts of those who hold the outcome of the war in their hands, so that the hurricane of violence may cease, and peaceful coexistence, in justice, may be rebuilt.
