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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in the Kingdom of Bahrain on the occasion of the “Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence” (3 to 6 November 2022) – Prayer meeting and Angelus with bishops, priests, consecrated persons, seminarians and pastoral workers at the Sacred Heart Church in Manama

Prayer meeting and Angelus with bishops, priests, consecrated persons, seminarians and pastoral workers at the Sacred Heart Church in Manama

This morning, after celebrating Holy Mass in private, the Holy Father Francis left the papal residence and transferred by car to the Sacred Heart Church in Manama where, at 9.20 (7.20 in Rome), he participated in a prayer meeting and recitation of the Angelus with bishops, priests, consecrated persons, seminarians, and pastoral workers.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received in front of the parish church by the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and by three children accompanied by a religious sister, who gave him a floral tribute. After the welcome greeting from the apostolic administrator of the Vicariate of Northern Arabia, Bishop Paul Hinder, O.F.M. Cap., and the parish priest, who brought him the cross and the holy water for aspersion, the Holy Father proceeded along the central nave up to the presbytery, as a hymn was sung.

After the hymn, the words of welcome from the apostolic administrator of the Vicariate of Northern Arabia and the liturgical greeting, a pastoral worker and a religious sister offered their witness; then, after the reading from the Gospel of John, Pope Francis delivered his address, at the end of which he led the recitation of the Angelus.

At the end, after the blessing and the final hymn, the Pope signed the Book of Honour and went to the ancient Sacred Heart Church for a private visit, accompanied by the superiors of the Secretariat of State, the cardinals, the apostolic nuncio and the apostolic administrator.

Then, before returning for a brief pause in his residence, Pope Francis met with a group of around a dozen Catholic pilgrims from this geographical area in a hall in the Sacred Heart Church complex. He thanked them for their witness, in communion with all the Church, and advised them never to cease trusting in prayer and not to lose their sense of humour, “the smile of the heart”. With emotion he gave them his blessing and greeted them

individually.

During his brief stay in the residence, the Pope greeted the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of Bahrain, head of the Committee of Honour, and therefore present at the events of these days in the name of the country.

The following is the Holy Father's address, delivered during the prayer meeting, to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons, seminarians, and pastoral workers, and his words before the recitation of the Angelus.

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Men and Women, Seminarians and Pastoral Workers, good morning!

I am pleased to be here, in the midst of this Christian community that clearly manifests its "Catholic" face: a universal face, a Church made up of people from various parts of the world who come together to profess our one faith in Christ. Yesterday, Bishop Hinder – whom I thank for his service and his words of introduction – talked about "a small flock made up of migrants". In greeting you, then, my thoughts also turn to the peoples from whom you come, to your dear families, whom you remember with a touch of nostalgia, and to your countries of origin. In particular, since I see that some of you are from Lebanon, I assure you of my prayers and closeness to your beloved country, so weary and sorely tried, as well as to all peoples suffering in the Middle East. It is beautiful to be part of a Church composed of different histories and different faces that find their harmony in the one face of Jesus. And this variety – as I have seen in these days – is a mirror of this country, of the people who dwell here in it, but also of its landscape that, though mostly desert, boasts a rich variety of plants and living creatures.

The words of Jesus that we heard speak of the living water flowing from Christ and his followers (cf. *Jn* 7:37-39). They made me think about this very land. While it is true that there is a large expanse of desert, there are springs of fresh water flowing underground that irrigate it. That is a beautiful image of who you are and, above all, of how faith operates in our lives: on the surface our humanity seems parched by any number of weaknesses, fears, challenges and personal or social problems of various types. Yet, truly within the depths of the soul, in the intimacy of the heart, there flows the calm and silent fresh water of the Spirit, who refreshes our deserts and restores life to what is parched, who washes away all that soils us and quenches our thirst for happiness. The Spirit always restores life. This is the water of which Jesus speaks. This is the wellspring of new life that he promises us. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the tender, loving and rejuvenating presence of God within us.

It is helpful, then, to focus on the scene described in the Gospel. Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem, where they are celebrating one of the most important feasts, when the people bless the Lord for the gifts of the land and the harvest, in remembrance of the Covenant. On that festive day, an important rite took place: the High Priest went to the pool of Siloam to draw water while the people sang and rejoiced; he then poured out the water outside the walls of the city in order to indicate that from Jerusalem would flow a great blessing for everyone. Indeed, the psalmist had sung of Jerusalem: "All my springs are in you" (Ps. 87:7), and the prophet Ezekiel had spoken of a fountain flowing like a river from the Temple, to irrigate the land and make it fruitful (cf. *Ezek* 47:1-12).

Against this backdrop, we can better appreciate what the Gospel of John wants to tell us with this scene. It is the last day of the feast, and Jesus "stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let them come to me and drink?'" (*Jn*. 7:37), for "rivers of living water" will flow from his heart (v. 38). What a beautiful invitation! The evangelist explains: "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (v. 39). The reference is to the moment when Jesus dies on the cross: at that moment, no longer from the temple of stone, but from the open side of Christ, will the water of new life flow forth, the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit, destined to give new birth to all humanity, setting it free from sin and death.

Brothers and sisters, let us always remember this: the Church was born there, born from the pierced side of Christ, from the water of rebirth in the Holy Spirit (cf. *Tit* 3:5). We are not Christians by our own merit or simply because we profess a creed, but because the living water of the Spirit was given to us in baptism, making us beloved children of God, brothers and sisters of one another and a new creation. Everything flows from grace – everything is grace! Everything comes from the Holy Spirit. Allow me, then, to focus briefly on *three great gifts* that the Holy Spirit grants us and asks us to receive and to reflect in our lives: *joy, unity and prophecy*. Joy, unity and prophecy.

First, the Spirit is a *wellspring of joy*. The fresh water that the Lord wants to make flow in the “deserts” of our humanity, earthly and frail, is the certainty that we are never alone on the journey of life. The Spirit is the One who does not leave us on our own. He is the Comforter, who consoles us by his quiet and soothing presence, who accompanies us with love, supports us in struggles and difficulties, encourages our most beautiful dreams and deepest desires, and opens us to the wonder and beauty of life. The joy of the Spirit, however, is not an occasional feeling or a momentary emotion; still less is it that kind of “joy held out by today’s individualistic and consumerist culture” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 128). The joy of the Spirit is instead a joy born of a relationship with God, from knowing that despite the struggles and dark nights that we sometimes endure, we are not alone, lost or defeated, because he is with us. With God, we can face and overcome everything, even the abyss of pain and death.

To all of you who have discovered this joy and experience it in community, I would say: *preserve this joy*, indeed, *let it grow ever greater*. Do you know the best way to do that? *By giving it away*. Yes, Christian joy is naturally contagious, since the Gospel makes us go beyond ourselves to share the beauty of God’s love. It is essential, therefore, that this joy not be dimmed or left unshared in Christian communities, that we do not restrict ourselves to doing things by force of habit, without enthusiasm or creativity. Otherwise we will lose faith and become a dull community, and this is awful! In addition to the liturgy, and especially the celebration of Mass, the source and summit of Christian life (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10), it is important that we spread the joy of the Gospel through a lively pastoral outreach, especially to young people and families, and through fostering vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. We cannot keep Christian joy to ourselves. It multiplies once we start spreading it around.

Second, the Holy Spirit is a *wellspring of unity*. All those who receive him receive the Father’s love and are made his sons and daughters (cf. *Rom* 8:15-16), and, if children of God, also brothers and sisters to one another. There can no longer be room for the works of the flesh, acts of selfishness, such as factions, quarrels, slander and gossip. Beware of gossip, please: gossip destroys a community. Worldly divisions, but also ethnic, cultural and ritual differences, cannot injure or compromise the unity of the Spirit. On the contrary, his fire burns away worldly desires and kindles in our lives the warm and compassionate love with which Jesus loves us, so that we in turn can love one another. For this reason, when the Spirit of the risen Jesus descends on his disciples, he becomes the source of unity and fraternity, opposed to every form of selfishness. He inaugurates the one language of love, so that different human languages no longer remain distant and incomprehensible. He breaks down the barriers of distrust and hate, in order to create space for acceptance and dialogue. He frees us from fear and instills the courage to go out and meet others with the unarmed and disarming force of mercy.

This is what the Holy Spirit does, and in this way he has shaped the Church from her very beginnings: starting with Pentecost, when a variety of backgrounds, sensibilities and visions were harmonized in communion, forged in a unity that is not uniformity; it was a harmony because the Holy Spirit is harmony. If we have received the Spirit, our ecclesial vocation is above all to preserve unity and cultivate it together – or as Saint Paul says – “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope” (*Eph* 4:3-4).

In her testimony, Chris said that when she was very young, what fascinated her about the Catholic Church was “the shared devotion of all the faithful”, quite apart from the colour of their skin, their country of origin and their language: everyone was gathered as a single family, singing the praises of the Lord. This is the strength of the Christian community; it is the first testimony that we are able to give to the world. Let us seek to be guardians and builders of unity! In order to be credible when we dialogue with others, let us live in fraternity among ourselves. Let us do so in our communities, valuing the charisms of each person without humiliating anyone. Let

us do so in our religious houses, as living signs of harmony and peace. Let us do so in our families, so that the sacramental bond of love is seen daily in service and forgiveness. Let us do so in the multi-religious and multi-cultural societies in which we find ourselves, as ever tireless promoters of dialogue and weavers of fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other creeds and confessions. I know that you are already offering a good example of walking this path, but fraternity and communion are gifts that we must never tire of imploring from the Spirit. In this way, we can fend off the enemy who always sows weeds.

Finally, the Spirit is a *wellspring of prophecy*. Salvation history, as we know, is full of prophets whom God calls, consecrates and sends into the midst of the people in order to speak in his name. The prophets receive an interior light from the Holy Spirit, which makes them attentive interpreters of reality, capable of perceiving God's presence amid the frequently obscure course of history and making it known to the people. The words of the prophets are often scathing: they call by name the evil designs lurking in the hearts of the people; they call into question false human and religious certainties, and they invite everyone to conversion.

We too have this prophetic vocation. All who are baptized have received the Spirit and so all become prophets. As such, we cannot pretend not to see the works of evil, so as to live a "quiet life" and not get our hands dirty. Sooner or later, Christians must get their hands dirty in order to live the Christian life and bear witness. On the contrary, we received a Spirit of prophecy to proclaim the Gospel by our living witness. In this regard, Saint Paul tells us: "Desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor 14:1). Prophecy makes us capable of putting the Beatitudes into practice in everyday situations, building meekly, yet resolutely God's kingdom, in which love, justice and peace are opposed to every form of selfishness, violence and degradation. I am grateful that Sister Rose spoke of the ministry carried out for those in prison, and this is noble! This is something for which we should be grateful. The prophecy that builds up and consoles those prisoners is our sharing time with them, breaking open the word of God and praying with them. It is our showing concern for them, for where there are brothers and sisters in need, like those in prison, there is also Jesus, who himself suffers in all those who suffer (cf. Mt 25:40). Do you know what I think about when I go into a prison? "Why them and not me?" It is the mercy of God. Caring for prisoners is good for everyone, as a human community, since the way in which these "least ones" are treated is a measure of the dignity and the hope of a society.

Dear brothers and sisters, during these months we have been praying a great deal for peace. In this context, the agreement that was signed and which concerns the situation in Ethiopia represents hope. I encourage everyone to support this commitment for a lasting peace, so that, with the help of God, those involved may continue to journey on the paths of dialogue and that the population may soon find once more a peaceful and dignified life. And also I do not want to forget to pray, and to tell you to pray, for tormented Ukraine, for that war to end.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, we have come to the end. I would like to say "thank you" for these days together, and remember: joy, unity and prophecy – remember these! With a heart full of gratitude I bless all of you, especially those who worked to prepare for this journey. Since these are my last public words, I thank His Majesty the King and the authorities of this country, and also the Minister of Justice who is here with us, for their exquisite hospitality. I encourage you to persevere in your spiritual and ecclesial journey with steadfastness and joy. Let us now invoke the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, whom I am happy to venerate as Our Lady of Arabia. May she help us always to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and keep us joyful and united in affection and love. I am counting on you: do not forget to pray for me.

[Angelus Dómini nuntiávit Mariæ...]
