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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in the Paul VI Hall, 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 *The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer*, focusing on the theme: "Jesus, teacher of proclamation" (Bible reading: *Lk 4:17-21*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present. He then recalled that the coming 27 January will be International Holocaust Remembrance.

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,

Last Wednesday we reflected on Jesus *model of proclamation*, on his pastoral heart always reaching out to others. Today we look to Him as a *teacher of proclamation*. *Model of proclamation*. Today, *the teacher of proclamation* Let us be guided by the episode in which He preaches in the synagogue of His village, Nazareth. Jesus reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah (cf. 61:1-2) and then surprises everyone with a very short "sermon" of just one sentence, just one sentence. And He speaks thus, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (*Lk. 4:21*). This was Jesus' sermon: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. This means that for Jesus that prophetic passage contains the essence of what He wants to say about Himself. So, whenever we talk about Jesus, we should go back to that first announcement of His. Let us see, then, what it consists of. Five essential elements can be identified.

The first element is *joy*. Jesus proclaims, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; [...] He has anointed Me to preach *good news* to the poor” (v. 18), that is, a proclamation of gladness, of joy. Good news: one cannot speak of Jesus without joy, because faith is a wonderful love story to be shared. Bearing witness to Jesus, doing something for others in His name, to have received “between the lines” of one’s life, so beautiful a gift that no words suffice to express it. Instead, when joy is lacking, the Gospel does not come through, because – it’s the very meaning of the word – is *good news*, and “Gospel” means “good news,” a proclamation of joy. A sad Christian can talk about beautiful things, but it is all in vain if the news he conveys is not joyful. A thinker once said, “A Christian who is sad is a sad Christian.” Don’t forget this.

We come to the second aspect: *deliverance*. Jesus says He was sent “release to the captives” (ibid.). This means that one who proclaims God cannot proselytize, no, cannot pressure others, no, but relieve them: not impose burdens, but take them away; bearing peace, not bearing guilt. Of course, following Jesus involves asceticism, involves sacrifices; after all, if every good thing requires these things, how much more the decisive reality of life! However, those who witness to Christ show the beauty of the goal rather than the toil of the journey. We may have happened to tell someone about a beautiful trip we took: for example, we would have spoken about the beauty of the places, what we saw and experienced, not about the time to get there and the queues at the airport, no! So, any announcement worthy of the Redeemer must communicate liberation. Like that of Jesus. Today there is joy, because I have come to liberate.

The third aspect: *light*. Jesus says He came to bring “sight to the blind” (ibid.). It is striking that throughout the Bible, before Christ, the healing of a blind man never appears, never. It was indeed a promised sign that would come with the Messiah. But here it is not just about physical sight, but a light that makes one see the life of a new world, and also life in a new way. There is a “coming into the light,” a rebirth that happens only with Jesus. If we think about it, that is how Christian life began for us: with Baptism, which in ancient times was called precisely “enlightenment.” And what light does Jesus give us? He brings us *the light of sonship*: He is the beloved Son of the Father, living forever; with Him we too are children of God loved forever, despite our mistakes and faults. So life is no longer a blind advance toward nothingness, no; it is not a matter of fate or luck, no. It is not something that depends on chance or the stars, no, or even on health or finances, no. Life depends on love, on the love of the Father, Who cares for us, His beloved children. How wonderful to share this light with others! Has it occurred to you that the life of each of us – my life, your life, our life – is an act of love? And an invitation to love? This is wonderful! But so many times we forget this, in the face of difficulties, in the face of bad news, even in the face of – and this is bad – worldliness, the worldly way of life.

The fourth aspect of the proclamation: *healing*. Jesus says He came “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (ibid.). The oppressed are those in life who feel crushed by something that happens: sickness, labors, burdens on the heart, guilt, mistakes, vices, sins... Oppressed by this. We think of the sense of guilt, for example. How many of us have suffered this? We think a little bit about the sense of guilt for this or that... What is oppressing us above all is precisely that evil that no medicine or human remedy can heal: sin. And if someone has a sense of guilt, it is for something they have done, and that feels bad. But the good news is that with Jesus, this ancient evil, sin, which seems invincible, no longer has the last word.

I can sin because I am weak. Each of us can do it, but that is not the last word. The last word is Jesus’ outstretched hand that lifts you up from sin. “And Father, when do you do this? Once?” No. “Twice?” No. “Three time?” No. Always. Whenever you are sick, the Lord always has His hand outstretched. Only He wants us (to) hold on and let Him carry you. The good news is that with Jesus this ancient evil no longer has the last word: the last word is Jesus’ outstretched hand that carries you forward.

Jesus heals us from sin, *always*. And how much do I have to pay for this healing? Nothing. He heals us always and *gratuitously*. He invites those who “labour and are heavy laden” -- He says it in the Gospel – invites them to come to Him (cf. Mt 11:28). And so to accompany someone to an encounter with Jesus is to bring them to the doctor of the heart, Who lifts up life. That is to say, “Brother, sister, I don’t have answers to so many of your problems, but Jesus knows you, Jesus loves you and can heal and soothe your heart. Go and leave them with Jesus.”

Those who carry burdens need a caress for the past. So many times we hear, "But I would need to heal my past...I need a caress for that past that weighs so heavily on me..." He needs forgiveness. And those who believe in Jesus have just that to give to others: the power of forgiveness, which frees the soul from all debt. Brothers, sisters, do not forget: God forgets everything. How so? Yes, He forgets all our sins. That He forgets. That's why He has no memory. God forgives everything because He forgets our sins. Only He wants us to draw near to the Lord and He forgives us everything. Think of something from the Gospel, from the one who began to speak, "Lord I have sinned!" That son... And the father puts his hand in his mouth. "No, it's okay, it's nothing..." He doesn't let him finish... And that's good. Jesus is waiting for us to forgive us, to restore us. And how often? Once? Twice? No. Always. "But Father, I do the same things always..." And He will always do His same thing! Forgiving you, embracing you. Please, let us not distrust this. This is the way to love the Lord. Those who carry burdens and need a caress for the past need forgiveness, and Jesus does that. And that's what Jesus gives: to free the soul from all debt. In the Bible it talks about a year when one was freed from the burden of debt: the Jubilee, the year of grace. As if it were the ultimate point of the proclamation.

In fact, Jesus says He came "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19). It was not a scheduled jubilee, like the ones we have now, where everything is planned and you think about how to do it and how not to do it. No. But with Christ the grace that makes life new always arrives and amazes. Christ is the Jubilee of every day, every hour, drawing you near, to caress you, to forgive you. And the proclamation of Jesus must always bring *the amazement of grace*. This amazement... "No, I can't believe it! I have been forgiven." But this is how great our God is. Because it is not we who do great things, but rather the grace of the Lord who, even through us, accomplishes unexpected things. And these are the surprises of God. God is the master of surprises. He always surprises us, is always waiting, waits for us. We arrive, and He has been expecting us. Always. The Gospel comes with a sense of wonder and newness that has a name: Jesus.

May He help us to proclaim it as He desires, communicating *joy, deliverance, light, healing, and wonder*. This is how one communicates about Jesus.

The last thing: This *good news*, which the Gospel says is addressed "to the poor" (v. 18). We often forget about them, yet they are the recipients explicitly mentioned, because they are God's beloved. Let us remember them, and let us remember that, in order to welcome the Lord, each of us must make him- or herself "poor within." It's not sufficient like this, no: [you have to be] "poor within." With that poverty... "Lord, I am in need, I am in need of forgiveness, I am in need of help, I am in need of strength. This poverty that we all have: making oneself poor interiorly. You have to overcome any pretense of self-sufficiency in order to understand oneself to be in need of grace, and to always be in need of Him. Is someone tells me, "Father, what is the shortest way to encounter Jesus?" Be needy. Be needy for grace, needy for forgiveness, be needy for joy. And he will draw near to you. Thank you.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Australia and the United States of America. In the context of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I offer a special greeting to the group from the Bossey Ecumenical Institute. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Appeal of the Holy Father

The day after tomorrow, January 27th, the International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust is observed. In remembrance of that extermination of millions of Jewish people and people of other faiths that must neither be forgotten nor denied. There can be no sustained commitment to building fraternity together without first dispelling the roots of hatred and violence that fuelled the horror of the Holocaust.

