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Audience with a delegation from the United Bible Societies

The following are the words of greeting the Holy Father Francis addressed to a delegation from the United Bible Societies during the audience held this morning in the Vatican Apostolic Palace:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank the Reverend Dirk Gevers, secretary general of the United Bible Societies, for his greeting. I extend my welcome to all of you and to the accompanying Cardinal Koch. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 16:24).

The book of the Acts of the Apostles narrates the spreading of the Word of God after the Paschal event. After Pentecost, with the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles spread the *kerygma*, explain the meaning of the Scriptures in the light of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and warn against those who use it with bad intentions or for petty interests.

The vicissitudes of the nascent Church are similar to those of our days. The Word is proclaimed, heard and lived in favourable and unfavourable circumstances, in different ways and with different expressions, facing serious difficulties and persecutions, in a world often deaf to the voice of God.

The nascent Church lives by the Word, proclaims it and, persecuted, flees with it as its only baggage. Thus, persecutions become opportunities to spread the Word, never to forget it. The case of the deacon Philip is emblematic: persecution drives him to Samaria and, having arrived there, he does not speak of his pain, but rather he preaches Christ and heals the sick, "so there was much joy in that city" (Acts 8:8).

I think of the many Christians who, in our time, are forced to flee their land. Men and women who, like the first

believers, flee, taking with them the Word they have received. They cherish their faith as the treasure that gives meaning to the hard, sometimes terrible circumstances they must face: embracing the cross of Christ, they venerate the Word of God that "will stand forever" (*Is* 40:8; cf. *1 Pet* 1:23-25).

But the book of Acts also warns us. Philip, in his mission, is also confronted with the inability of two of his interlocutors to understand and receive the Word of God. In very different circumstances, both have access to the Word, but Simon Magus is so full of himself that he prevents himself from receiving God's gift; the Ethiopian, on the other hand, is thirsty for God and not only understands the Word through Philip's ministry, but asks him for Baptism, receives it, and continues his journey as a Christian and - the text says - "rejoicing" (*Acts* 8:39).

Dear brothers and sisters, the "journey" of the Word of God continues today, and you, with your activity, place yourselves at its service. The dissemination of the Bible through the publication of texts in various languages and their distribution in different continents is a commendable work. The data that you publish are significant; and I rejoice to know that this task of the United Bible Societies is increasingly being carried out in collaboration with many Catholics in many countries.

I ask the Holy Spirit to guide and support your service always. Indeed, he is capable of revealing the depths of God, in such a way that those who approach the sacred text come to "the obedience of faith" (*Rm* 16:26), the encounter with God, through Jesus Christ (cf. v. 27).

Thank you for this visit, and I wholeheartedly invoke the Lord's blessing on you and your work. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
