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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, on the eve of the Easter Triduum, the Pope focused on the theme: "The Crucified one, source of hope" (Bible reading: *1 Pt 2:21-24*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful. He went on to make an appeal, on the occasion International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, to be held tomorrow, and then recalled in a special way the victims of war crimes and the mothers of the Ukrainian and Russian soldiers fallen in the war.

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!

This past Sunday, the Liturgy had us listen to the Passion of the Lord. It ended with these words: "They sealed the stone" (cf. *Mt 27:66*). Everything seemed over. For the disciples, that boulder signified *the final end of their hope*. The Teacher was crucified, killed in the cruelest and most humiliating manner, hung upon the infamous gallows outside the city – a public failure, the worst possible ending, it was the worst at that time. Now for us today, there is nothing entirely strange regarding the discouragement that oppressed the disciples. Gloomy thoughts and feelings of frustration accumulate in us as well. Why is there so much indifference toward God? This is interesting: Why is there so much evil in the world? Well, look, there is evil in the world! Why do inequalities continue to increase and why is that long-awaited peace not arriving? Why are we so attached to war, to treating each other badly? In each person's heart, how many expectations have faded; how many delusions there are! And again, there is that feeling that times gone by were better and that in the world, perhaps

even in the Church, things are not going the way they once did.... In short, even today, hope sometimes seems to be sealed behind the stone of mistrust. And I invite each one of you to think: Where is your hope? Is your hope alive, or have you sealed it up there, or have you put it there in a drawer, like a memory? Does your hope push you to walk or is it a romantic memory, as if it is something that doesn't exist. Where is your hope today?

One image remained fixed in the minds of the disciples: *the cross*. That is where everything ended. That is where the end of everything was centred. But in a little while, they would discover a new beginning right there, in the cross. Dear brothers and sisters, this is how God's hope germinates. It is born and reborn in the black holes of our disappointed expectations – and hope, true hope, instead, never disappoints. Let us think precisely about the cross: out of the most terrible instrument of torture, God wrought the greatest sign of his love. Having become the tree of life, that wood of death reminds us that God's beginnings often begin with our ends. Thus, he loves to work wonders. So today, *let us look at the tree of the cross so that hope might germinate in us* – that everyday virtue, that silent, humble virtue, but also that virtue that keeps us on our feet, that helps us move forward. It is not possible to live without hope. Let us think: Where is my hope? Today, *let us look at the tree of the cross so that hope might germinate in us*...that we might be healed of our sadness. And how many sad people there are. When I used to be able to go out onto the streets, I cannot do it now because they do not allow me, but when I could go out onto the streets in another diocese, I used to like watching people's faces. How many sad faces! Sad people, people talking to themselves, people walking alone with their cell phones, but without peace, without hope. And where is your hope today? It takes a bit of hope, right? to be healed from the sadness that makes us ill – there is so much sadness – to be healed from the bitterness with which we pollute the Church and world. Brothers and sisters, let us look there, at the crucifix. And what do we see? We see *Jesus naked, Jesus stripped, Jesus wounded, Jesus tormented*. Is it the end of everything? That's where our hope is.

In these two aspects, let us then grasp how hope, which seems to have died, is reborn. Firstly, let us see Jesus stripped of his clothing. In fact, "And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots" (v. 35). God is stripped – He who has everything allowed Himself to be stripped of everything. But that humiliation is the path of our redemption. This is how God overcomes our appearances. Indeed, we find it difficult to bare ourselves, to be truthful. We always try to cover the truth because we do not like it. We clothe ourselves with outward appearances that we look for and take good care of, masks to disguise ourselves and to appear better than we are. This is a bit like the "make-up" attitude: interior make-up, to seem better than others.... We think it is important to show off, to appear like this, so others will speak well of us. And we adorn ourselves with appearances, we adorn ourselves with appearances, with unnecessary things. But we do not find peace this way. Then the make-up goes away and you look at yourself in the mirror with the ugly, but true, face you have – the one that God loves – not the one with make-up on. And stripped of everything, Jesus reminds us that hope is reborn by being truthful about ourselves – to tell ourselves the truth – by letting go of duplicity, by freeing ourselves from peacefully co-existing with our falsity. Sometimes, we are so used to telling ourselves lies that we live with the lies as if they are truth, and we end up being poisoned by our own falsity. This is what is needed: to return to the heart, to the essentials, to a simple life, stripped of so many useless things that are surrogates of hope. Today, when everything is complex and we risk losing a sense of meaning, we need simplicity, we need to rediscover the value of sobriety, the value of renunciation, to clean up what is polluting our hearts and makes them sad. Each one of us can think of something useless that we can free ourselves from to find ourselves again. Think about how many things are useless. Here, fifteen days ago at Santa Marta, where I live – it is a hotel for a lot of people – the idea circulated that for this Holy Week it would be good to look in our closets and get rid of things, to give away the things we have that we don't use. You cannot imagine the number of things! It's good to get rid of useless things. And this went to the poor, to the people in need. We too, how many useless things we have inside our hearts – and outside as well. Look at your closets: look at them. This is useful, this is useless...and do some cleaning there. Look at the closet of your soul – you laugh, right? It's true, it's true. Look at the closet of your soul – how many useless things you have, how many stupid illusions. Let us return to simplicity, to things that are true, that don't need to be made-up. What a good exercise!

Let us direct our second glance to the Crucifix and we see *Jesus* who is *wounded*. The cross displays the nails that pierce his hands and feet, his open side. But to the wounds in his body are added those of his soul. How much anguish, Jesus is alone, betrayed, handed over and denied by his own – by his friends and even his disciples – condemned by the religious and civil powers, excommunicated, Jesus even feels abandoned by God (cf. v. 46). In addition, the reason for his condemnation appears on the cross: "This is Jesus, the King of the

Jews” (v. 37). This is a mockery: He, who had fled when they wanted to make him king (cf. *Jn 6:15*), is now condemned for having made himself king. Even though he had committed no crime, he was placed in the middle of two criminals, and they prefer the violent Barabbas over him (cf. *Mt 27:15-21*). In the end, Jesus is wounded in body and in soul. I ask myself: In what way does this help our hope? In this way, what does Jesus, naked, stripped of everything, of everything, say to my hope, how can this help me?

We too are wounded – who isn't in life? And they are often hidden wounds we hide out of embarrassment. Who does not bear the scars of past choices, of misunderstandings, of sorrows that remain inside and are difficult to overcome? But also of wrongs suffered, sharp words, unmerciful judgements? God does not hide the wounds that pierced his body and soul, from our eyes. He shows them so we can see that a new passage can be opened with Easter: to make *holes of lights* out of our own wounds. “But, Your Holiness, you are exaggerating”, someone might say to me. No, it's true. Try it, try it. Try doing it. Think about your wounds, the ones you alone know about, that everyone has hidden in their heart. And look at the Lord and you will see, you will see how holes of light come out of those wounds. Jesus does not incriminate on the cross, but loves. He loves and forgives those who hurt him (cf. *Lk 23:34*). Thus, he converts evil into good; thus, he converts and transforms sorrow into love.

Brothers and sisters, the point is not whether we are wounded a little or a lot in life, the point is what to do with my wounds – the little ones, the big ones, the ones that leave their mark forever on my body, on my soul. What can I do with my wounds? What can you, you, you, do with your wounds? “No, Father, I don't have any wounds” – “Be careful, think twice before saying this”. And I ask you: what do you do with your wounds, with the ones only you know about? You can allow them to infect you with resentment and sadness, or I can instead unite them to those of Jesus, so that my wounds too might become luminous. Think of how many young people, how many young people, do not tolerate their own wounds and look for a way of salvation in suicide. Today, in our cities, so many young people see no other way out, they have no hope, and prefer to get high using drugs, to forget...poor people. Think about this. And you, what is the drug you use to hide your wounds? Our wounds can become springs of hope when, instead of feeling sorry for ourselves or hiding them, we dry the tears shed by others; when, instead of nourishing resentment for what was robbed of us, we take care of what others are lacking; when, instead of dwelling on ourselves, we bend over those who suffer; when, instead of being thirsty for love, we quench the thirst of those in need of us. For it is only if we stop thinking of ourselves, that we will find ourselves again. But if we continue to think of ourselves, we will not find ourselves anymore. And it is by doing this, the Scriptures say, that our wound is healed quickly (cf. *Is 58:8*), and hope flourishes anew. Think about this: What can I do for others? I am wounded. I am wounded by sin, I am wounded by my past, everyone has their own wound. What can I do? Lick my wounds for the rest of my life? Or can I look at the wounds others have and go with the wounded experience of my life to heal, to help others? This is today's challenge for all of you, for each of you, for each one of us. May the Lord help us move forward.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada and the United States of America. May this Holy Week lead us to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. God bless you!

Appeals of the Holy Father

Tomorrow is the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, established by the United Nations. I hope that it might contribute to intensify proposals for solidarity and friendly dispositions and fraternal sharing.

During this Holy Week of the Passion of Christ, commemorating his unjust death, I remember in a special way all

the victims of war crimes and, as I invite you to pray for them, let us lift up a prayer to God so that everyone's heart might be converted. And, looking at Mary, Our Lady, in front of the Cross, my thought goes out to the mothers: to the mothers of the Ukrainian and Russian soldiers who have fallen during the war. They are the mothers whose sons have died. Let us pray for these mothers.
