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Penitential Vigil presided over by the Holy Father at the end of the Retreat in preparation for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

The penitential vigil presided over by the Holy Father Francis at the conclusion of the retreat in preparation for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place today at 18.00, at the Altar of the Cathedra in Saint Peter's Basilica.

The following is the Pope's reflection, delivered during the course of the celebration:

Dear brothers and sisters,

As Sirach reminds us, "the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds" (35:21).

We are here as beggars of the Father's mercy, asking for forgiveness.

The Church is always the Church of the poor in spirit and sinners seeking forgiveness. It is not only a Church of the righteous and saints, but rather of the righteous and saints who recognize that they are poor sinners.

I wanted to write down the requests for forgiveness that were read by some of the Cardinals, because it was necessary to call our principal sins for what they are. We hide them or say them with too many polite words.

Sin is always a wound in relationships: the relationship with God and the relationship with our brothers and sisters. Sisters and brothers, no one is saved alone, but it is equally true that the sin of one affects many others. Just as everything is connected in the good, it is also connected in evil.

The Church in its essence is a Church that is always relational in its faith and proclamation, and only by healing sick relationships can we become a synodal Church. How could we be credible in our mission if we do not acknowledge our mistakes and stoop to heal the wounds we have caused by our sins?

Healing the wound begins by confessing the sin we have committed. The parable in Luke's Gospel that we heard presents us with two men, a Pharisee and a publican, who both go to the temple to pray. One stands proudly upright, the other stands back, his eyes downcast. The Pharisee fills the scene with his eye-catching stature, imposing himself as a model. In this way he presumes to pray, but in reality he is celebrating himself, masking his frailties by his ephemeral confidence.

What does he expect from God? A reward for his merits. In this way, he deprives himself of the surprise of the gratuitousness of salvation, fashioning for himself a god who could do nothing more than sign a certificate of presumed perfection. A man closed to surprise, closed to all surprises. He is completely closed in on himself, closed to the great surprise of mercy. His own "I" leaves no room for anything or anyone, not even God.

How many times in the Church do we behave this way? How many times have we also taken up all the space, with our words, our judgments, our titles, our belief that only we are deserving? In this way we perpetuate what happened when Joseph and Mary, with the Son of God in her womb, knocked on doors of places of hospitality. Jesus will be born in a manger because, as the Gospel tells us, "there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7).

We are all like the publican today, we have or want to have our eyes downcast and we want to feel shame for our sins. Like him, we stand back, clearing the space occupied by presumption, hypocrisy and pride. Let us bishops, priests, consecrated women and men say it too: clearing the space occupied by presumption, hypocrisy and pride.

We could not invoke God's name without asking for forgiveness from our brothers and sisters, the Earth and all creatures.

We are beginning this phase of the Synod, and how could we be a synodal Church without reconciliation? How could we claim to want to walk together without receiving and giving the forgiveness that restores communion in Christ? Forgiveness, asked for and given, creates a new harmony in which differences are not opposed, and the wolf and the lamb are able to live together (cf. Is11:6). How courageous is Isaiah's example!

In the face of evil and innocent suffering we ask: Where are you Lord? But we should ask, Where are we? We should ask ourselves about our own responsibility when we are not able to stop evil with good. We cannot expect to resolve conflicts by fuelling violence that becomes more and more heinous, redeem ourselves by causing pain, save ourselves by the death of the other. How can we pursue a happiness paid for by the unhappiness of our brothers and sisters?

This is for everyone: lay women and men, consecrated women and men, for everyone! On the eve of the beginning of the Synod Assembly, confessing our sins is an opportunity to restore trust in the Church, a trust broken by our mistakes and sins, and to begin to heal the wounds that do not stop bleeding, breaking "the bonds of injustice" (Is 58:6).

We say this in the *Adsumus* prayer with which we will introduce the celebration of the Synod tomorrow, "We are here burdened by the enormity of our sin". We would not want this burden to slow down the progress of the Kingdom of God in history.

We have tried to do our part, although we have made mistakes. We continue in the mission as we are able, but now we turn to you young people who are waiting for us to pass on our witness, asking forgiveness from you too if we have not been credible witnesses.

On today's liturgical memorial of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, patroness of missions, we ask for her intercession.

There is a brief pause of silence. Then, all standing bow their heads.

The Holy Father then prays:

O Father, we are gathered here aware that we need your loving gaze. Our hands are empty; we can receive only as much as you give us. We ask your forgiveness for all our sins. Help us restore your face that we have disfigured by our unfaithfulness. With shame, we ask forgiveness from those who have been wounded by our sins.

Give us the courage of sincere repentance for conversion.

We ask this invoking the Holy Spirit that he may fill with his grace the hearts you have created, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We all ask for forgiveness, we are all sinners, but we all have hope in your love, Lord.

Amen.
