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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, the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on "The Spirit and the Bride: the Holy Spirit guides the People of God towards Jesus our hope", focusing on the theme "A letter written with the Spirit of the living God: Mary and the Holy Spirit" (Bible reading: Acts 1:12-14).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present. Then, after announcing the *World Meeting on Children's Rights* and the canonization of Blesseds Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati, he made an appeal for Ukraine.

The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Catechesis of the Holy Father: The Spirit and the Bride: the Holy Spirit guides the People of God towards Jesus our hope. 13. "A letter written with the Spirit of the living God: Mary and the Holy Spirit"

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Among the various means by which the Holy Spirit implements His work of sanctification in the Church – the Word of God, the Sacraments, prayer – there is one in entirely particular, and it is *Marian piety*. In the Catholic tradition there is this motto, this saying: "*Ad Iesum per Mariam*", that is, "to Jesus by means of Mary". Our Lady lets us see Jesus. She opens the doors to us, always! Our Lady is the mother who leads us by the hand towards Jesus. Our Lady never points to herself, Our Lady points to Jesus. And this is Marian piety: to Jesus by the hands of Our Lady.

Saint Paul defines the Christian community as “a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh” (2 Cor 3:3). Mary, as the first disciple and figure of the Church, is also a letter written with the Spirit of the living God. Precisely for this reason, she can be “known and read by all” (2 Cor 3:2), even those who do not know how to read theology books, those “little ones” to whom Jesus says that the mysteries of the Kingdom, hidden to the wise, are revealed (cf. Mt 11:25).

By saying her “Yes” – when Mary accepts and says to the Angel, “Yes, let the Lord’s will be done” and accepts to be the mother of Jesus – it is as though Mary said to God: “Here I am, I am a tablet to be written on: let the Writer write what he wants, make of me what the Lord of all wishes”[1]. At that time, people wrote on waxed tablets; today we would say that Mary offers herself like a blank page on which the Lord can write whatever He wants. Mary’s “Yes” to the Angel – as a renowned exegete wrote – represents “the apex of all religious behaviour before God, since she expresses, in the highest manner, passive availability combined with active readiness, the deepest emptiness that accompanies the greatest fullness”[2].

This, then, is how the Mother of God is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification. In the midst of the endless profusion of words said and written about God, the Church and holiness (that very few, or no-one, is able to read and understand fully), she suggests a few words that everyone, even the simplest, can say on any occasion: “*behold*” and “*let it be done*”. Mary is the one who said “Yes” to the Lord, and with her example and by her intercession urges us to say our “Yes” to Him too, whenever we are faced with an act of obedience to perform or a trial to overcome.

In every age of our history, but in particular at this time, the Church finds herself in the same situation as the Christian community in the aftermath of Jesus’ Ascension to heaven. It had to preach the Gospel to all nations, but was awaiting the “power from on high” in order to be able to do it. And let us not forget that, at that time, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples were gathered around “Mary the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14).

It is true that there were also other women together with her in the Upper Room, but her presence is different and unique among them all. Between her and the Holy Spirit there is a unique and eternally indestructible bond that is the very person of Christ Himself, “who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary”, as we recite in the Creed. The evangelist Luke deliberately highlights the correlation between the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary in the Annunciation and His coming to the disciples at Pentecost, using some identical expressions in both cases.

Saint Francis of Assisi, in one of his prayers, greets Our Lady as “daughter and handmaid of the heavenly Father, the almighty King, Mother of our most high Lord Jesus Christ, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit”[3]. Daughter of the Father, Spouse of the Holy Spirit! The unique relationship between Mary and the Trinity could not be illustrated in simpler words.

Like all images, this one of the “Spouse of the Holy Spirit” must not be rendered absolute, but taken for that amount of truth it contains, and it is a very beautiful truth. She is the bride, but before that, she is the disciple of the Holy Spirit. Bride and disciple. Let us learn from her to be docile to the inspirations of the Spirit, especially when He suggests to us to “arise in haste” and go to help someone who needs us, as she did straight after the angel left her (cf. Lk 1:39). Thank you!

[1] *Comment on the Gospel of Luke*, fragment. 18 (GCS 49, p. 227).

[2] H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Friburgo in Br. 1968: Italian translation Brescia 1983, 154.

[3] *Fonti Francescane*, Assisi 1986, no. 281.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those coming from Norway, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ! God bless you!

Announcement and Appeal of the Holy Father

On the occasion of the International Day of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, held today, I wish to announce that next 3 February the *World Meeting on Children's Rights*, entitled "Love them and protect them", will take place here in the Vatican, with the participation of experts and figures from various countries. It will be an opportunity to identify new ways of assisting and protecting millions of children who are still without rights, who live in precarious conditions, who are exploited and abused, and who suffer the dramatic consequences of wars.

There is a group of children preparing for this Day, thanks to all of you who are doing this. And here, there is a brave girl who is coming here... now they are all coming! Children are like that: one starts and then they all come" Let us greet the children! Thank you! Good morning!

I want to say that next year, during the Jubilee for Adolescents, I will canonize Blessed Carlo Acutis, and that on the Jubilee for Young People, next year, I will canonize Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Yesterday marked one thousand days since the invasion of Ukraine, a tragic milestone for the victims and for the destruction it has caused, but at the same time a shameful catastrophe for the whole of humanity! However, this must not discourage us from continuing to stand beside the tormented Ukrainian people, nor from imploring for peace and working to make weapons give way to dialogue and confrontation to encounter.

The other day I received a letter from a university student from Ukraine, which said: "Father, when on Wednesday you remember my country, and will have the opportunity to speak to the entire world about the thousandth day of this terrible war, I beg you, do not speak only of our sufferings, but also bear witness to our faith: although it is imperfect, its value does not diminish, it paints a picture of the Risen Christ with painful brushstrokes. These days there have been too many deaths in my life. Living in a city where a missile kills and injures dozens of civilians, witnessing so many tears is difficult. I would have liked to escape, I would have liked to go back to being a child embraced by my mother, I would have liked to be in silence and love, but I thank God because through this pain, I learn to love more. Pain is not just a path to anger and despair; if it is based on faith,

it is a good teacher of love. Father, if pain hurts, it means that you love; therefore, when you speak of our pain, when you remember the thousand days of suffering, remember also the thousand days of love, because only love, faith and hope give true meaning to the wounds". This is what was written by this Ukrainian university student.
