



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 21 March 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

And today is the first day of Spring: Happy Spring! But what happens in Spring? Plants blossom, trees flower. I will ask you some questions. Can a sick tree or plant fully blossom if it is sick? No! Can a tree, a plant which is not watered by rain or artificially, blossom nicely? No. And can a tree and a plant whose roots have been removed or which have no roots flower? No. Without roots, can they flower? No! And this is a message: Christian life has to be a life that must blossom in works of charity, in doing what is good. But if you have no roots, you cannot blossom, and who is the root? Jesus! If you are not with Jesus, there in the roots, you will not blossom. If you do not water your life with prayer and the sacraments, will you bear Christian flowers? No! Because prayer and the sacraments water the roots and our life blossoms. I hope that your Spring may be bloom beautifully, as blooming as Easter will be; blossoming with good works, virtue and doing good to others. Remember this, this is a very beautiful verse from my country: "What blossoms a tree bears come from what lies underneath it". Never cut off Jesus' roots.

And let us now continue with the catechesis on the Holy Mass. The celebration of Mass which we have been reviewing in stages is organized around Communion, that is, in being united to Jesus; the Sacramental Communion: not spiritual communion which you can have in your own home by saying: "Jesus I would like to receive you spiritually". Not, Sacramental Communion, with the Body and the Blood of Christ. We celebrate the Eucharist to nourish ourselves of Christ who gives himself both in Word and in the Sacrament of the Altar, in order to conform us to him. The Lord himself says this: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him". (Jn 6:56). In fact, Jesus' gesture of *giving* his Body and Blood to his disciples at the Last Supper, still

continues today through the ministry of the priests and deacons; ordinary ministers of the distribution of the Bread of life and the Cup of salvation, to the brothers and sisters.

During Mass, after breaking the consecrated Bread, that is the Body of Christ, the priest shows it to the faithful, inviting them to participate in the Eucharistic banquet. We know the words that ring out from the sacred altar: "Happy are those who are called to his Supper. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". Inspired by a passage in the Book of Revelation — "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9): it says "marriage" because Jesus is the Spouse of the Church — this invitation calls us to experience intimate union with Christ, the source of joy and holiness. It is an invitation which brings happiness and at the same time spurs us to an examination of conscience enlightened by faith. If in fact, on the one hand we can see the distance which separates us from the sanctity of Christ, on the other, we believe that his Blood is "shed for the forgiveness of sins". We were all forgiven at Baptism and we are all forgiven or will be forgiven when we approach the sacrament of Reconciliation. And do not forget: Jesus always forgives. Jesus never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. In fact it is in considering the salvific value of this Blood that Saint Ambrose exclaimed: "If I sin continually, I must always have a remedy" (*De Sacramentis*, iv, 6, 28: pl 16, 446a). In this faith, we too turn our gaze to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and we invoke him: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed". We say this at every Mass.

Although we are the ones who stand in procession to receive Communion; we approach the altar in a procession to receive communion, in reality it is Christ who comes towards us to assimilate us in him. There is an encounter with Jesus! To nourish oneself of the Eucharist means to allow oneself to be changed by what we receive. Saint Augustine helps us understand this when he talks about the light he received when he heard Christ say to him: "I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me" (*Confessions* VII, 10, 16: pl 32, 742). Each time we receive Communion, we resemble Jesus more; we transform ourselves more fully into Jesus. As the Bread and the Wine are converted into the Body and Blood of the Lord, so too those who receive it with faith are transformed into a living Eucharist. You reply "Amen" to the priest who distributes the Eucharist saying "the Body of Christ"; that is, you recognize the grace and the commitment involved in becoming the Body of Christ. Because when you receive the Eucharist, you become the Body of Christ. This is beautiful; it is very beautiful. As it unites us to Christ, tearing us away from our selfishness, Communion opens us and unites us to all those who are a single thing in him. This is the wonder of Communion: we become what we receive!

The Church strongly desires that the faithful also receive the Lord's Body with Hosts consecrated at the same Mass; and the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more fully expressed when Holy Communion is received under the two Species, even though we know that Catholic doctrine teaches us that Christ, whole and entire, is received even under only one Species, (cf. *girm*,

85:281-282). According to ecclesiastical norms, the faithful normally approach the Eucharist in a processional manner, as we have said, and receive Communion standing with devotion, or on their knees as established by the Episcopal Conference, receiving the Sacrament either on the tongue or in the hand, if allowed, as preferred (cf. girm 160-161). After Communion, silence, silent prayer helps us treasure in our hearts the gift which we have received. To slightly extend that moment of silence, speaking to Jesus in our hearts, helps us a great deal, as does singing a psalm or a hymn of praise (cf. girm 88) that can help us be with the Lord.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist ends with the prayer after Communion. On behalf of everyone, with that prayer the priest turns to God to thank him for having shared the banquet and to ask that what was received may transform our lives. The Eucharist makes us strong in order to produce fruit in good works to live as Christians. Today's prayer is significant: we ask the Lord that "the participation in his Sacrament may be for us a heavenly medicine, heal us from sin and reaffirm us in his friendship" (cf. Roman Missal, Wednesday, Fifth week of Lent). Let us approach the Eucharist: receiving Jesus who transforms us into him makes us stronger. The Lord is so good and so great!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from Wales, Ireland, Norway, Japan and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the Irish pilgrims accompanying the icon of the Ninth World Meeting of Families, to be celebrated in Dublin in August. With prayerful good wishes that this Lenten season will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

I am planning to travel to Dublin on 25-26 August this year for the World Meeting of Families. As of now, I thank the civil authorities, the Bishops, the Archbishop of Dublin and all those who are working together to prepare this journey. Thank you.

I offer a special thought to *young people*, the *elderly*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. We are coming to the end of the Lenten time of grace. Never tire of asking for God's forgiveness in Confession and, in your suffering, unite yourselves ever more to that of the Cross of Christ, imitating it in forgiveness and reciprocal help.