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Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to the archdiocese of Milan: Holy Mass in Monza Park

At 15.30 this afternoon, in Monza Park, the Holy Father Francis presided at Mass for the faithful of the archdiocese of Milan.

Upon arrival, the Holy Father toured the various areas into which the area was divided, greeting the faithful.

Then, in the area used as a sacristy, the Pope was welcomed by Giovanna Vilasi, prefect of Monza, Pietro Luigi Ponti, president of the Province, and Roberto Scannagatti, mayor of Monza. The Holy Father then briefly met with the concelebrating bishops and the organisers of the visit.

At the end of Mass, His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola, archbishop of Milan, addressed some words of thanks to the Pope.

During the rite, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father pronounced the following homily:

Holy Father's Homily

We have just heard the most important proclamation of our history: the annunciation to Mary (cf. Luke 1:26-38). A dense passage, full of life, and which I like reading in the light of another announcement: that of the birth of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 1:5-20). Two successive announcements that are united; two announcements that, compared to each other, show us what God gives to us in His Son.

The annunciation of John the Baptist occurs when Zechariah the priest, ready to initiate the liturgy, enters into the Sanctuary of the Temple, while the whole assembly waits outside. The annunciation of Jesus instead takes place in a remote place in Galilee, in a peripheral city with a poor reputation (cf. John 1:46), in the anonymity of the house of a young girl named Mary.

This contrast is not insignificant, and signals to us that the new Temple of God, the new encounter of God with His people, will be in places that normally we do not expect, in the margins, in the periphery. There they will make their appointment, they will meet; there God will make Himself flesh so as to walk together with us from the womb of His Mother. It will no longer occur in a place reserved to the few while the majority remain outside waiting. Nothing and no-one will be indifferent to Him; no situation will be deprived of His presence: the joy of salvation begins in the daily life of the house of a young girl from Nazareth.

God Himself is the one Who takes the initiative and chooses to enter, as He did with Mary, into our homes, our daily struggles, filled with anxiety and with desires. And it is within our cities, in our schools and universities, our squares and hospitals, that the most beautiful announcement we can hear is made: "Rejoice, the Lord is with you". A joy that generates life, that generates hope, that is made flesh in the way we look to the future, in the attitude with which we look at others. A joy that becomes solidarity, hospitality, mercy towards all.

Like Mary, we too can be bewildered: "How will this be" in a time so full of speculation? Speculation about life, work, the family. We speculate on the poor and on migrants; we speculate on the young and their future. Everything seems to be reduced to figures, while letting the daily life of many so families be tinged with uncertainty and insecurity. While pain knocks at many doors, while in many young people there is growing dissatisfaction at the lack of real opportunities, speculation abounds everywhere.

Certainly, the dizzying pace to which we are subject would appear to rob us of hope and joy. The pressures and powerlessness in the face of many situations would seem to wither the soul and make us insensitive to innumerable challenges. And paradoxically when everything accelerates so as to build, in theory, a better society, in the end we have no time for anything or anyone. We lose time for the family, for the community; we lose time for friendship, for solidarity and for memory.

It is good for us to ask ourselves: how is it possible to live the joy of the Gospel within our cities today? Is Christian hope possible in this situation, here and now?

These two questions touch our identity, the life of our families, of our towns and our cities. They touch the life of our children, our young people, and demand from us a new way of positioning ourselves in history. If joy and Christian hope are to continue to be possible, we cannot and we must not remain before many painful situations as mere spectators who look at the sky waiting for it to stop raining. Everything that happens demands that we look at the present boldly, with that boldness of he who knows that the joy of salvation takes shape in the daily life of the house of a young girl from Nazareth.

Before Mary's bewilderment, before our own bewilderment, the Angel offers us three keys to help us accept the mission entrusted to us.

1. Evoking Memory

The first thing the Angel does is to evoke memory, thus opening the present moment of Mary to all the history of Salvation. He evokes the promise made to David as the fruit of the covenant with Jacob. Mary is the daughter of the Covenant. Today we too are invited to make memory of this, to look at our past so as not to forget where we come from; so as not to forget our ancestors, our grandparents and all they have been through to reach us where we are today. This land and its people have experienced the pain of two world wars; and at times they saw their deserved reputation for industriousness and civilisation polluted by unregulated ambitions. Memory helps us not to remain prisoners of discourses that sow fracture and division as the only way to resolve conflicts. Evoking memory is the best antidote available to us against the magic solutions of division and estrangement.

2. Belonging to the People of God

Memory allows Mary to take possession of her belonging to the People of God. It is good for us to remember that we are members of the People of God! Milanese, yes; Ambrosians, certainly, but part of the great People of

God. A people made up of a thousand faces, histories and provenances, a multicultural and multiethnic people. This is one of our riches. It is a people called upon to accommodate differences, to integrate them with respect and creativity, and to celebrate the novelty that comes from others; it is a people that is not afraid of embracing boundaries and frontiers; it is a people that is not afraid to welcome those in need as it knows that there the Lord is present.

3. The possibility of the impossible

“Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37): in this way the Angel’s answer to Mary ends. When we believe that everything depends exclusively on us, we remain prisoners of our abilities, of our efforts, of our short-sighted views. When instead we allow ourselves to be helped, to be advised, when we open ourselves to grace, it seems that the impossible starts to become reality. This is well known in those lands that, throughout their history, have generated many charisms, many missionaries, much wealth for the life of the Church! How many faces that, overcoming the sterile pessimism that divides, have opened themselves to the initiative of God and have become a sign of how fertile a land may be if it does not close itself in its own ideas, within its own limits and capabilities, instead opening up to others.

As before, God continues to seek allies; He continues to seek men and women capable of believing, capable of making memory, of feeling they are part of His people, to cooperate with the creativity of the Spirit. God continues to walk our neighbourhoods and streets, going everywhere in search of hearts able to listen to His invitation and to make it flesh here and now. To paraphrase St. Ambrose in his comment on this passage, we can say that God continues to seek hearts like that of Mary, willing to believe even in entirely extraordinary conditions (cf. *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke II*, 17: PL 15, 1559). May the Lord increase in us this faith and this hope.
