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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Holy Father's appeal

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 a.m. in St. 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 focused on the theme "Hope against all hope" (cf. *Romans* 4:16-25).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. Then, after greeting the delegation of Iraqi superintendents, composed of representatives of different religious groups present at the audience, he invited those present to pray for reconciliation in Iraq.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The passage from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans that we have just listened to is a great gift to us. Indeed, we are used to recognizing Abraham as our father in faith: today the Apostle enables us to understand that

Abraham is, for us, a *father in hope*; not only *father in faith*, but also *father in hope*. And his is because in his story we can already perceive an announcement of the Resurrection, of the new life that defeats evil and death itself.

In the text we read that Abraham believed in the God that “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (*Rm 4:17*), and then specifies, “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead ... or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb” (*Rm 4:19*). This here is the experience that we too are called to live. The God Who reveals Himself to Abraham is the God Who saves, the God Who brings us out from desperation and from death, the God Who calls to life. In the story of Abraham, everything becomes a hymn to the God Who liberates and regenerates; everything becomes prophecy. And it becomes thus for us, for we who now recognize and celebrate the fulfilment of all this in the Paschal mystery. Indeed, God “raised from the dead Jesus our Lord” (*Rm 4:24*), so that we too can pass in Him from death to life. And truly then Abraham will be well able to describe himself as “father of many nations”, inasmuch as he shines like the proclamation of a new humanity – us! – redeemed by Christ from sin and death, and introduced once and for all in the embrace of God’s love.

At this point, Paul helps us to bring into focus the very close bond between *faith and hope*. Indeed, he affirms that “in hope he believed against hope” (*Rm 4:18*). Our hope is not based on human reasoning, predictions and reassurances; and it manifests itself where there is no longer hope, where there is nothing to hope in any more, as with Abraham, faced with his imminent death and the barrenness of his wife Sara. The end was near for them, they could not have children, and in that situation Abraham believed and had hope against all hope. And this is great! The great hope is rooted in faith, and it is precisely for this reason that it is able to go beyond all hope. Yes, because it is based not on our word, but on the Word of God. In this sense too, then, we are called to follow the example of Abraham, who despite the evidence of a reality that seemed destined for death, he trusts in God, “fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised” (*Rm 4:21*). I would like to ask you a question: are we all convinced of this? Are we convinced that God wishes us well and that all that He promised us is able to bring it to fruition? But Father, how much do we have to pay for this? There is just one price: opening your hearts. Open your hearts and this strength of God will lead you ahead, it will do miraculous things and will teach you what hope is. This is the only price: open your heart to faith and He will do the rest. This is the paradox and at the same time the strongest, highest element of our hope! A hope based on a promise that from a human point of view seems uncertain and unpredictable, but which is no less even when faced with death, when it is the God of Resurrection and of life Who promises. This is not a promise from anyone? He Who promises is the God of Resurrection and of life.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord today for the grace to remain founded not on our securities, on our abilities, but rather on the hope that springs from God’s promise, like true children of Abraham. When God promises, He keeps His promise. He never reneges on His word. And so our life will assume a new light, in the awareness that He Who revived His Son will revive us too, and will make us truly one with Him, together with all our brothers in faith. We all believe. Today we are all in the square, we praise the Lord, we will sing the Lord’s Prayer, then we will receive the blessing. But this passes. But this is also a promise of hope. If today we have an open heart, I assure you that all of us will meet in the square of Heaven that never comes to an end. This is God’s promise, and this is our hope, if we open our hearts. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims, especially the young people from France and also the Association of Paralytics and the Wellspring Community.

As we prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, always keep the steadfast hope of returning to life with Him one day. This hope gives us the strength to persevere on the road of our life. God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from England, Scotland, Finland, Norway, the Philippines and the United States of America. I offer a special welcome to the United Kingdom's All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Holy See, with appreciation for their work. With prayerful good wishes that this Lent 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 all.

German

I address a cordial greeting to German speaking pilgrims. Nurture your hope through daily contact with Christ, in prayer, in reading the Gospel, and in works of charity. Make the most of this time of Lent to renew faith in the God of life. May the Lord protect you and your families.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish speaking pilgrims. In this time of Lent, let us ask the Virgin Mary to help us intensify our spiritual preparation so that the celebration of the Paschal mystery of Christ may renew our faith and hope. May the Lord bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

With special affection I greet the group of "Amigos do Museu de Portugal", and also the teachers and students of the "Coégio Cedros", wishing all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims present and their respective families a renewed spiritual vitality, in faithful and generous service to Christ and the Church. Look to the future with hope, and never tire of working in the Lord's vineyard. May the Virgin Mary watch over your journey.

Arabic

I address a warm welcome to Arabic speaking pilgrims, especially those from Iraq. Dear brothers and sisters, out of faith Mary received the Angel's word, and believed in the proclamation that she would become the Mother of God, and she welcomed even that which she did not understand of God's action, letting Him open her mind and heart. Like her, we too are called to live sustained by faith, and to look with hope to the fulfilment of God's will in our life. May the Lord bless you.

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims, and especially the group of partially-sighted faithful from Wieliczka. Dear brothers and sisters, as we prepare to celebrate the mysteries of the death and resurrection of our Lord, let us

learn to live the hope that is stronger than death or any evil, inasmuch as it is based on the Word of God Who revived His Son and will restore us too to new life. May His blessing accompany you always. Jesus Christ be praised!

Italian

I address a warm welcome to Italian speaking pilgrims. I greet priests from the Focolari Movement, the association "Provida Italia" and the "Pro Venerdì Santo" Committee of Cave.

I greet the faithful of Cassino, who remember the seventieth anniversary of the consecration of the Church of St. Antonio of Padova; the "Unasca Italia" Group and the Basket for Ever team from Gaeta. May your visit to the Eternal City help you grow in communion with the universal Church and with Peter's Successor.

Finally, I address a special greeting to the young, the sick and newly weds. Dear young people, the Lenten season is precious for rediscovering the importance of faith in daily life; dear sick people, join your sufferings with those of Christ on the cross for the construction of a civilisation of love; and you, dear newly weds, encourage the presence of God in your new family.

Holy Father's appeal

I am pleased to greet the delegation of Iraqi superintendents, composed of representatives of different religious groups, accompanied by His Eminence Cardinal Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The richness of the dear Iraqi nation consists precisely in this mosaic that represents unity in diversity, strength in union, prosperity in harmony. Dear brothers, I encourage you to go ahead on this road and I invite you to pray that Iraq may find peace, unity and prosperity in reconciliation and harmony between the various ethnic and religious groups. My thoughts go to the civil populations trapped in the western districts of Mosul and those displaced by war, to whom I feel united in suffering, through prayer and spiritual closeness. In expressing my profound sorrow for the victims of the bloody conflict, I renew to all my appeal for every effort to be made to protect civilians, an imperative and urgent obligation.
