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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Announcement of the pre-Synodal Meeting of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.40 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 "Missionaries of hope today".

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

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

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In this catechesis I want to talk on the theme of "Missionaries of hope today". I am pleased to do so at the beginning of October, which is particularly devoted to the mission in the Church, and also to the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, who was a great missionary of hope!

In fact, the Christian is not a prophet of misfortune. The essence of his announcement is the opposite: it is Jesus, Who died for love, and Whom God rose up on Easter morning. This is the core of the Christian faith. If the Gospels stopped at the burial of Jesus, the story of this prophet would add to the many biographies of heroic persons who gave their lives for an ideal. The Gospel would then be an edifying and consoling book, but it would not be an announcement of hope.

But the Gospels do not end on Holy Friday, they go beyond; and it is precisely this further fragment that transforms our lives. The disciples of Jesus were despondent on that Saturday after His crucifixion; that rock rolled on the door of the tomb had also closed the three exciting years they experienced with the Master of Nazareth. It seemed that everything was over, and some, disappointed and frightened, were already leaving Jerusalem.

But Jesus rises! This unexpected fact overthrows and subverts the minds and hearts of the disciples. Because Jesus rises not for Himself, as if His rebirth were a prerogative to be envious of: if He ascends to the Father is because He wants His resurrection to be part of every human being, and to lift every creature. And on the day of Pentecost the disciples are transformed by the breath of the Holy Spirit. They will not only have good news to bring to everyone, but they will be different from before, as they are born to a new life.

How beautiful it is to think that you are announcers of the resurrection of Jesus not only in words but in the facts and in the testimony of life! Jesus does not want disciples able to repeat formulas learned by heart. He wants witnesses: people who propose hope with their way of welcoming, smiling, loving. Especially loving: because the strength of the resurrection makes Christians able to love even when love seems to have lost its reasons. There is a "something more" that inhabits Christian existence, which is not explained simply by the force of mind or greater optimism. It is as though believers were people with an extra "piece of heaven" above them, accompanied by a presence that one cannot even intuit.

Therefore, the task of Christians in this world is to open space for salvation, like cells of regeneration capable of restoring lymph to what seemed lost forever. When the sky is overcast, one who knows how to speak of the sun is a blessing. So, the true Christian is like this: not complaining or angry, but convinced, by the strength of the resurrection, that no evil is infinite, no night is endless, no man is definitively wrong, no hatred is invincible to love.

Certainly, sometimes the disciples pay a high price for this hope given to them by Jesus. Let us think of the many Christians who did not abandon their people at time of persecution. They stayed there, even when their immediate future was uncertain, where no kind of plans could be made; they stayed, hoping in God. Those who have had the grace of embracing Jesus' resurrection can still hope in the unhoped-for. Martyrs of all times, with their allegiance to Christ, show us that injustice is not the last word in life. In the risen Christ we can continue to hope. Men and women who have a "why" in life resist more than others in times of misfortune. But those Who have Christ at their side really no longer fear anything. And for this reason, Christians are never easy and accommodating men. Their mildness must not be confused with a sense of insecurity and remorse. Saint Paul urges Timothy to suffer for the Gospel: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 *Tm* 1: 7). Though they fall, they always arise.

That is why the Christian is a missionary of hope. Not by his own merit, but thanks to Jesus, the grain of wheat which, in falling to earth, died and bore much fruit (cf. *Jn* 12: 24).

Greetings in various languages

French

I gladly welcome French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the group from the diocese of Avignon, with Archbishop

Jean-Pierre Cattenoz, as well as pilgrims from France and Switzerland. On this feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, let the Lord make you true “*missionaries of hope*” among your brothers and sisters! God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, particularly the groups from England, Scotland, Denmark, Nigeria, Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, China and the United States of America. I especially greet the new students of the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, with the assurance of my closeness in prayer as they begin their studies for the priesthood. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

I address a warm greeting to all German-speaking pilgrims, in particular the faithful of the parish of Saint Mary in *Cloppenburg-Bethen*, and the students of the *Franziskaner-gymnasium Kreuzburg*. I wish you a good stay in Rome and give you all my heartfelt blessing.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular the groups from Spain and Latin America. Let us pray to Jesus, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and St Francis of Assisi, that we may spread the seeds of hope and love around us. May the Lord bless you. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I cordially greet Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, and in particular the faithful of the parish of *Ressurreição do Senhor, de Jardim*, who have come here with the desire to affirm and consolidate their faith and following of Christ. May the Lord fill you with joy and the Holy Spirit enlighten the decisions of your life, so that you may carry out faithfully the will of the heavenly Father. Pray for me; my prayer for you and God’s blessing will not be lacking.

Arabic

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular the delegation from Egypt, for the blessing of the icon depicting the flight to Egypt of the Holy Family, fleeing the oppression and injustice of King Herod. I affectionately remember my apostolic trip to your good land, and your generous people; the land where Saint Joseph, the Virgin Mary, the Child Jesus and many prophets lived; a land blessed throughout the centuries by the precious blood of the martyrs and the righteous; a land of coexistence and hospitality; a land of encounter, history and civilisation. May the Lord bless you all and protect your country, the Middle East and the entire world from every evil, every terrorism and from the evil one!

Polish

I cordially greet the Polish pilgrims on the day of the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. I would like to recall that a hundred years ago in Fatima, in each of the six appearances, Our Lady asked, “I would like you to pray the Rosary every day”. In response, let us pray together for the Church, for the See of Peter and for the intentions of all the world. Let us ask forgiveness for sins. Let us pray for the conversion of doubters, for those who deny God and for the souls in purgatory. To all of you who pray the Rosary, I bless you heartily!

Italian

I address a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am glad to welcome the participants in the General Chapter of the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers) and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, gathered in the general Conference. I encourage you to promote your charism with a spirit of service and faithfulness to the Church.

I cordially greet the Family Commission of Triveneto, accompanied by the bishop of Verona, Msgr. Giuseppe Zenti; parish groups; young people of the community of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, of Pescara; members of the YMCA, which works in relation to problems that most affect the young; the Haemopathic Child Association and the environmental coordination group of Anagni.

Finally, I address an affectionate thought to the young, the sick and newlyweds. Today we celebrate the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi. May his example of life strengthen in each one of you, dear young people, your care for creation; may it support you, dear people who are sick, alleviating your daily efforts; and may it be of help to you, dear newlyweds, in building your family in charitable love.

Announcement of the pre-Synodal Meeting of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly

I would like to announce that from 19 to 24 March 2018, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops will convene a pre-synodal meeting, inviting young people from different parts of the world: both young Catholics and young people from different Christian denominations and other religions, and non-believers.

This initiative forms part of the preparations for the next General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the theme of “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment” in October 2018. Through this journey, the Church wishes to listen to the voice, the sensitivity, of faith and also the doubts of and criticisms from young people – we must listen to young people. The conclusions of the March Meeting therefore will be transmitted to the Synod Fathers.
