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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.35 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 began a new cycle of catechesis on the Holy Mass.

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!

Today we begin a new series of catechesis, focusing on the "heart" of the Church, that is the Eucharist. It is fundamental for us as Christians to understand well the value and meaning of the Holy Mass, to live ever more fully our relationship with God.

We cannot forget the great number of Christians who, in all the world, in two thousand years of history, have resisted to the death to defend the Eucharist; and how many, today too, risk their life to participate in the Sunday

Mass. In the year 304, during the persecutions of Diocletian, a group of Christians in North Africa were caught celebrating Mass in a house, and were arrested. The Roman proconsul, in his interrogation, asked them why they had done it, knowing that it was entirely forbidden. And they answered, "Without Sunday we cannot live", which meant, if we cannot celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live, our Christian life would die.

Indeed, Jesus said to His disciples, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (*Jn* 6: 53-54).

Those Christians of North Africa were killed because they celebrated the Eucharist. They left the witness that earthly life can be renounced for the Eucharist, because it gives us eternal life, making us participants in Christ's victory over death. A witness that challenges all of us and demands an answer on what it means for each one of us to participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass and approach the Lord's table. Are we looking for that source that "gushes living water" for eternal life? That turns our life into a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and makes us one body with Christ? This is the deepest meaning of the holy Eucharist, which means "thanksgiving"; giving thanks to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Who captivates us and transforms us in His communion of love.

In the next catechesis I would like to give an answer to some important questions on the Eucharist and on the Mass, to rediscover, or discover, how God's love shines through this mystery of faith.

Vatican Council II was strongly inspired by the desire to lead Christians to understand the greatness of faith and the beauty of the encounter with Christ. For this reason it was necessary, first and foremost, to carry out with the guidance of the Holy Spirit a suitable renewal of the liturgy, as the Church continually lives from and renews herself thanks to this.

A central theme that the Council Fathers underlined is the liturgical formation of the faithful, indispensable for a true renewal. And this is precisely the aim of this cycle of catechesis we are beginning today: to grow in awareness of the great gift that God has given us in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a marvellous event in which Jesus Christ, our life, makes His presence felt. To participate in Mass is to live once again the passion and the redemptive death of the Lord. It is a theophany: the Lord makes Himself present on the altar to be offered to the Father for the salvation of the world (Homily during Holy Mass at Santa Marta, 10 February 2014). The Lord is there with us, present. Very often we go there, we look at things, we chatter among ourselves while the priest celebrates the Eucharist... and we do not celebrate close to Him. But it is the Lord! If today the President of the Republic or someone very important in the world were to come, it is certain we would all be close to him, that we would want to greet him. But think: when you go to Mass, there is the Lord there! And you are distracted. It is the Lord! We must think about this. "Father, it's just that masses are boring". – "But what are you saying, that the Lord is boring?" – "No, no, the Mass, the priests" – "Ah, so may the priests convert, but it is the Lord Who is there!" Is that clear? Do not forget. "Participating in Mass means living once more the passion and redemptive death of the Lord".

Let us now try to ask ourselves some simple questions. For example, why do we make the sign of the Cross and perform the penitential act at the beginning of the Mass? And here I would like to add something else, in parenthesis. Have you seen how children make the sign of the cross? You don't know what they are doing, whether they are making the sign of the cross or a drawing. They go like this [makes a confused gesture]. We must teach children to make the sign of the cross well. This is how the Mass begins, this is how life begins, this is how the day begins. This means that we are redeemed by the cross of the Lord. Look at children and teach them how to make the sign of the cross. And those Readings, during Mass, why are they there? Why are three texts read on Sunday, and on the other days two? Why are they there, what does the Reading of Mass mean? Why are they read and what do they have to do with it? Or, why at a certain point does the priest who is presiding at the celebration say: "Lift up your hearts"? He does not say, "Lift up your cellphones to take a photograph!" No, that is a bad thing! And I say to you, it makes me very sad when I am celebrating here in the square or in the Basilica, and I see lots of cellphones raised up, not only by the faithful, but also by some priests

and even bishops. Please! Mass is not a show: it means going to encounter the passion and the resurrection of the Lord. This is why the priest says, "Lift up your hearts". What does this mean? Remember: no cellphones.

It is very important to return to the basics, to rediscover what is essential, through what we touch and see in the celebration of the Sacraments. The question of the apostle Saint Thomas (cf *Jn* 20: 25), to be able to touch and see the wounds left by the nails in Jesus' body, is the desire to be able in some way to "touch" God to believe in Him. What Saint Thomas asks of the Lord is what we all need: to see and touch Him to be able to recognize Him. The Sacraments encounter this human need. The Sacraments, and the Eucharistic celebration in a special way, are the signs of God's love, and privileged ways to encounter Him.

So, through these catecheses that begin today, I would like to rediscover with you the beauty that is concealed in the Eucharistic celebration, and that, once revealed, gives full meaning to the life of each person. May Our Lady accompany us in this new stretch of the road. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I gladly greet French-speaking pilgrims from Belgium, Switzerland, Lebanon, France and in particular the young people of the Collège-Fénelon-Sainte-Marie of Paris. Through this new cycle of catechesis, the Lord can help us to rediscover the value and meaning of the Holy Mass, to live more fully our relationship with Him. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from New Zealand, the Philippines, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

I am pleased to greet the brothers and sisters from German-speaking countries. I greet in particular the group of the *Limburger Domsingknaben* and I thank them for their song. The Eucharist is the source of the life of every Christian. Let us allow ourselves to be transformed by this presence of the Lord's love. I bless you and your loved ones heartily.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, especially the groups from Spain and Latin America. Let us pray to the Virgin Mary to intercede for us so that we feel the desire to know and love more the mystery of the Eucharist, Sacrament of the Body and Blood of her Son Jesus. May the Lord bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

I warmly greet Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, in particular the faithful of the diocese of Santo Angelo, wishing ever greater growth in the love and adoration of the Eucharist, so that this Sacrament may continue to form your communities in charity and in communion, following the heart of the Father. I gladly bless you and your loved ones.

Arabic

I address a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from the Middle East. Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is Jesus Himself Who gives Himself fully to us. To be nourished by Him and to dwell in Him through Eucharistic communion transforms our life in a gift to God and to our brothers. Let us enter into this dynamism of love and we will become, following Jesus' example, people of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet all Polish people. Next Sunday, upon an initiative of the Polish Episcopal Conference and the Association *Help to the Suffering Church*, you will celebrate the ninth Day of Solidarity with the Persecuted Church, spiritually and materially supporting our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Thank you for this! May your prayers and your offerings be a concrete aid and a sign of the bond with all those suffering in the world in Christ's name. To those of you present here, and to your relatives, especially the editorial staff and listeners of Radio Katowice, on the 90th anniversary of its activity, I heartily impart my blessing.

Italian

I cordially welcome Italian pilgrims.

I am delighted to welcome the participants in the International Congress of Benedictine Oblates and the Carmelite Schools; the Brothers of Christian Schools, on the occasion of the Training Course and the Verbite Missionaries, on their refresher course. I hope that each one of you in this meeting may revive your communion with the universal ministry of the Successor of Peter.

I greet the parishes, in particular that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Andria and of Saint Michael in Minervino Murge; the AVIS Association of Pianezza; the Pro Fatima Prayer Group of Lourdes of Afragola, the rehabilitation community Fanelli di Castellamare di Stabia and the Group of Early Workers.

I finally greet the young, the sick and newlyweds. May today's memorial of the Saints Martyrs, whose relics are conserved here in Saint Peter's Basilica, increase in you, dear young people, your attention to Christian witness also in difficult contexts; may it help you, dear people who are sick, to offer your sufferings to support the many persecuted Christians; and may it encourage you, dear newlyweds, to trust in the help of the Lord and not only in your own abilities.
