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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Greetings to the faithful in Saint Peter's Basilica

This morning's General Audience, initially scheduled to take place in Saint Peter's Square, was held at 9.40 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall due to unfavourable weather conditions. The Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world. Those unable to find a place in the Paul VI Hall followed the Audience from the Basilica, where the Pope went at the end to greet those present.

In his address in Italian the Pope continued his catechesis on the Holy Mass, focusing on the Eucharistic Liturgy: I. *Presentation of gifts*.

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!

Let us continue with the catechesis on the Holy Mass. The Liturgy of the Word – on which I have reflected in the

last catecheses – is followed by the other constitutive part of the Mass, which is the *Eucharistic Liturgy*. In this, through the holy signs, the Church continuously makes present the Sacrifice of the new covenant sealed by Jesus on the altar of the Cross (cf. Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47). It was the first Christian altar, that of the Cross, and when we approach the altar to celebrate Mass, our memory goes to the altar of the Cross, where the first sacrifice was made. The priest, who in the Mass represents Christ, carries out what the Lord Himself did and handed over to the disciples at the Last Supper: *He took the bread and the cup, gave thanks, and gave them to the disciples*, saying: “Take, eat, and drink: this is my Body; this is the cup of my Blood. Do this in memory of me”.

Obedient to the command of Jesus, the Church has arranged the Eucharistic Liturgy in *moments that correspond to the words and gestures made by Him* on the eve of His Passion. Thus, in the *preparation of the gifts*, bread and wine are brought to the altar, that is, the elements that Christ took in His hands. In the *Eucharistic Prayer* we give thanks to God for the work of redemption and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is followed by the *breaking of the Bread* and the *Communion*, through which we relive the experience of the Apostles who received the Eucharistic gifts from the hands of Christ Himself (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 72).

The first gesture of Jesus: “He took the bread and the cup of wine”, therefore corresponds to the *preparation of the gifts*. It is the first part of the Eucharistic Liturgy. It is good that the faithful present the bread and wine to the priest, because they signify the spiritual offering of the Church gathered there for the Eucharist. It is beautiful that it is the faithful themselves who bring the bread and wine to the altar. Although today “the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance” (*ibid.*, 73). And in this regard it is significant that, in ordaining a new priest, the bishop, when he gives him bread and wine, says: “Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God” (*Roman Pontifical - Ordination of bishops, priest and deacons*). The people of God who bring the offering, the bread and the wine, the great offertory for the Mass! Therefore, in the signs of bread and wine, the faithful people place their offering in the hands of the priest, who lays it on the altar or table of the Lord, “which is the centre of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist”, (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 73). That is, the centre of the Mass is the altar, and the altar is Christ; we must always look at the altar, which is the centre of the Mass. In the “fruit of the earth and the work of man”, the faithful therefore offer their commitment to make of themselves, obedient to the divine Word, a “sacrifice pleasing to God the Father Almighty”, “for the good of all His holy Church”. Thus “the lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with His total offering, and so acquire a new value” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1368).

Of course, our offering is small, but Christ needs this little that we give. He asks little of us, the Lord, and He gives us much. He asks little. He asks us, in ordinary life, for good will; He asks us for an open heart; He asks us for the desire to be better, to welcome Him, He Who offers Himself to us in the Eucharist; He asks us for these symbolic offerings that then become His body and His blood. An image of this oblation movement of prayer is represented by the incense which, consumed in the fire, releases a fragrant smoke that rises upwards: incensing the offerings, as is done on feast days, incensing the cross, the altar, the priest and his people visibly manifests the offertory bond that unites all these elements to Christ’s sacrifice (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 75). And do not forget: there is the altar, which is Christ, but always with reference to the first altar, which is the Cross, and on the altar that is Christ, we bring our small gifts, the bread and the wine, which will then become great: Jesus Himself Who gives life to us.

And all this is also expressed by the *offertory prayer*. In it the priest asks God to accept the gifts that the Church offers Him, invoking the fruit of the wonderful exchange between our poverty and His wealth. In the bread and in the wine we present to Him the offering of our life, so that it may be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the sacrifice of Christ and become with Him the single spiritual offering pleasing to the Father. While the preparation of the gifts is concluded, the Eucharistic Prayer is recited (cf. *ibid.*, 77).

The spirituality of *the gift of oneself*, that this moment of the Mass teaches us, can illuminate our days, our relationships with others, the things we do, and the sufferings we encounter, helping us to build the earthly city in the light of the Gospel.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the young people from the various regions of France. I invite you to increase in your daily life this spirituality of giving that is fully expressed in the offertory of the Mass, and which leads us to offer to the Lord our activities, our sufferings and our relations with others. God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Slovakia and the United States of America. 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!

German

A warm welcome to German-speaking pilgrims, in particular the group of *Latzfons* in Alto Adige. The preparation of the bread and the wine in the celebration of the Eucharist teaches us the *spirituality of self-giving*. Let us ask the Lord that Mass reinvigorate us in our devotion to God and to our neighbour in all his needs. God bless you all.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular the groups from Spain and Latin America.

In this Lenten time, I encourage you to live profoundly the *spirituality of self-giving* which the Eucharist teaches us, so that the prayer, fasting and almsgiving of these days may bring concrete results in the authentic conversion of the heart. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I extend a cordial greeting to all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially to the faithful of Portugal and Brazil. I hope that this pilgrimage may reinforce in you your faith in Jesus Christ Who, in the Holy Mass, associates us with His sacrifice on the Cross, calling every faithful to collaborate in the construction of a more just and beautiful world. God bless each of you!

Arabic

I extend a cordial greeting to Arabic-speaking faithful, especially those from Syria, the Holy Land and the Middle East. In the Eucharist we offer to the Lord the things that He himself has given us, asking Him to give Himself to us in return. We learn from this exchange between our poverty and His wealth that we are enriched only in self-giving; only in opening our hearts to the Lord and to our brothers do we allow God to fill us with the abundance of His grace. May the Lord bless you all and protect you from the evil one.

Polish

I cordially greet the Polish faithful present here. We are living Lent: a time for reflection, conversion and spiritual renewal. Meditate carefully on the events of the Way of the Cross, the singing of *Lenten Lamentations* and the contents of the readings of the spiritual exercises. May they be an aid in renewing, strengthening or establishing a spiritual relationship with Christ. Keep your heart open to the power of God, and your eyes on the needs of others. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking faithful.

I am pleased to welcome the participants in the General Chapter of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate; the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the “Volunteers of God” of the Focolare Movement.

I greet the faithful of Pavullo nel Frignano, accompanied by Bishop Germano Bernardini; the young guests at L’Aquila Reception Centre; school institutes, especially those of Civitavecchia and the Pallottine Sisters of Rome; the members of the Order of Malta of Lombardy and Veneto and the FAIPA associates: “*Le Chiavi d’Oro*”, “The Golden Keys”. I hope you are all able to live the faith as service to God and to your brothers.

Finally I greet young people, the sick and newlyweds. Lent is a favourable time to intensify your spiritual life: the practice of fasting may help you, dear young people, to acquire greater mastery over yourselves; prayer is for you, dear people who are sick, a means to entrust your sufferings to God and always to feel close to Him; and finally, may the works of mercy help you, dear newlyweds, to live your married life always oriented towards the needs of your brothers.

Greetings to the faithful in Saint Peter’s Basilica

Thank you! Thank you very much for your patience in waiting until now. May the Lord bless you, and bless your patience. But I think it was better to be here rather than in the cold, wasn’t it? Really? Yes! Good. Now I will give you the blessing, but first let us pray to Our Lady.

[Hail Mary...]

[Blessing]
