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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 8.55 a.m. in Saint Peter's Square. In his address in Italian the Pope began a new cycle of catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles, focusing this week on the theme "*He presented Himself to them ... alive and gave them this command ... wait for the gift my Father promised*" (Bible passage: from the *Acts of the Apostles* 1: 3-4).

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 recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us begin today a cycle of catechesis through the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. This biblical book, written by Saint Luke the Evangelist, speaks to us about the journey of the Gospel in the world and shows us the wonderful partnership between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit which inaugurates the time of evangelization. The protagonists of the Acts are truly a lively and effective "couple": the Word and the Spirit.

God "sends His command to the earth" and "His word runs swiftly", says the Psalm (147: 4). The Word of God runs, it is dynamic, it irrigates every terrain on which it falls. And what is its strength? Saint Luke tells us that the human word becomes effective not thanks to rhetoric, which is the art of speaking well, but thanks to the Holy Spirit, which is the *dýnamis* of God, His strength, which has the power to purify the word, to make it the bearer of life. When the Spirit visits the human word, it becomes dynamic, like "dynamite", that is, capable of igniting hearts and disrupting mindsets, resistance and walls of division, opening up new ways and broadening the boundaries of the people of God.

The only One Who gives vibrant sonority and incisiveness to our human word, so fragile, capable even of lying

and of shirking its responsibilities, is the Holy Spirit, by means of which the Son of God was generated; the Spirit who anointed Him and supported Him on His mission; the Spirit thanks to which He chose His apostles and which guaranteed perseverance and fruitfulness to their proclamation, just as He guarantees it to ours today too.

The Gospel concludes with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the narrative plot of the Acts of the Apostles starts out precisely from here, from the overabundance of the life of the Risen Christ, transfused in His Church. Saint Luke tells us that Jesus “presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1: 3). The Risen Christ performs these very human gestures, such as sharing His meal with His followers, and invites them to live trustfully the expectation of the fulfilment of the promise of the Father: “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1: 5).

The baptism in the Holy Spirit, in fact, is the experience that enables us to enter into personal communion with God and to participate in His universal salvific will, acquiring the gift of *parrhesia*, or rather the capacity to pronounce a word like “children of God”: clear, free, effective, full of love for Christ and for brothers.

Therefore there is not need to fight to earn or deserve the gift of God. All is given *freely* and *in its own time*. Faced with the keenness to know in advance the time in which the events He has announced will happen, Jesus responds to His followers: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1. 7-8).

The Risen One invites His followers not to live the present with anxiety, but to make an alliance with time, to know how to await the unravelling of a sacred history that has not been interrupted but that is advancing, to know how to wait for the “steps” of God, Lord of time and space. The Risen One invites His people not to “manufacture” the mission by themselves, but to wait for the Father to energize their hearts with His Spirit, so as to be part of a missionary witness capable of radiating from Jerusalem to Samaria and extending beyond the borders of Israel to reach the peripheries of the world.

The Apostles live this wait together, like a family of the Lord, in the upper room or cenacle, whose walls are still witnesses to the gift with which Jesus consigned Himself to His people in the Eucharist. And how do they wait for the strength, the *dýnamis* of God? Praying consistently, as though they were not many in number but just one. It is indeed with prayer that one defeats solitude, temptation and suspicion, and opens up the heart to communion. The presence of women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, intensifies this experience: they were the first to learn from the Master to bear witness to the faithfulness of love and the strength of communion that vanquishes every fear.

Let us to ask the Lord for the patience to await His steps, not to “fabricate” our own work and to remain obedient in prayer, invoking the Spirit and cultivating the art of ecclesial communion.

Following his catechesis, the Holy Father greeted “English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!”

In his greetings to German speakers, he mentioned in particular the participants in the “Peace Ride” of the “Jesus-Bikers”. He addressed a special greeting to the young Polish pilgrims who will attend the Meeting of young people in Lecnica.

In his words to Italian pilgrims, he welcomed those attending the Chapter of the Congregation of the Holy Family, the participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies, and the editors of the “Salesian

Bulletin”, as well as the “Adultissimi” Group of Italian Catholic Action, seminarians from the preparatory seminary in Molfetta, parish communities, the participants in the “Clericus cup”, the school groups present, and members of the Council of the Military Magistrature, and those of the police and traffic police of Fermo. He concluded by reminding those present that tomorrow we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord.
