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General audience: the Gospel of Mercy

Vatican City, 6 April 2016 – Following the recent cycle of catechesis of the Wednesday general audience, focusing on God's mercy in the Old Testament, this morning the Holy Father began a reflection on how Jesus brought this to completion. "Jesus makes visible a love that is open to all, without limits. A pure, gratuitous and absolute love. A love that culminates in the Sacrifice of the Cross. The Gospel is truly the 'Gospel of Mercy', because Jesus is mercy".

The four Gospels confirm that Jesus, before commencing His ministry, wished to receive baptism from St. John the Baptist, an event that conveys the orientation of all of Christ's mission. Indeed, He is not presented to the world in the splendour of the temple, although He could have done so, and He is not announced by the sound of trumpets ... and neither does He come in the guise of a judge. Instead, after thirty years of life hidden away in Nazareth, Jesus went to the river Jordan, along with many of His people, and He lined up with the sinners to be baptised. Therefore, from the beginning of His ministry, He presented Himself as the Messiah who takes upon Himself the human condition, moved by solidarity and compassion".

In the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus reaffirms that everything He achieved after baptism was the fulfilment of the initial plan: "to bring to all the love of God Who saves", explained the Pope. The importance of Jesus' gesture is not immediately understood by those who were present on the banks of the River Jordan, but only by the Father, Who declares "'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'. "In this way, the Father confirms the path that the Son has undertaken as the Messiah, while the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove. Thus, one might say, Jesus' heart beats in unison with the heart of the Father and of the Spirit, showing all humanity that salvation is the fruit of God's mercy".

On the Cross we may contemplate even more clearly the great mystery of this love. As He is about to die, innocent, for us sinners, He implores the Father, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do". "On the Cross, Jesus presents to God's mercy the sin of the word, and with this all our sins. Nothing and no-one is excluding from this sacrificial prayer of Jesus. This means that we must not fear being recognised as and confessing ourselves as sinners, as every sin was brought to the Cross by the Son. And when we confess and repent, entrusting ourselves to Him, we are sure of being forgiven. The sacrament of Reconciliation restores to everyone the strength of the forgiveness that springs from the Cross and renews in our life the grace of mercy that Jesus obtained for us. We must not fear our miseries: the power of the love of the Crucified is boundless and endless.

And this mercy cancels out our miseries".

In this Jubilee Year, concluded Francis, "let us ask of God the grace to experience the power of the Gospel: the Gospel of mercy that transforms, that makes us enter into God's heart, that makes us capable of forgiving and looking to the future, with greater goodness. If we welcome the Gospel of Christ, crucified and resurrected, all our life will be shaped by the strength of His love that renews".
