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## General Audience

### Catechesis of the Holy Father

### Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.15 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 "The Mass is prayer".

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 our catechesis on the Holy Mass. To understand the beauty of the Eucharistic celebration I wish to begin with a very simple aspect: the Mass is prayer, or rather, it is the quintessential prayer, the highest, the most sublime, and at the same time the most "concrete". Indeed, it is the encounter of love with God through His Word and the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is an encounter with the Lord.

But first we must answer a question. What truly is prayer? It is first and foremost dialogue, a personal

relationship with God. And man was created as a being in a personal relationship with God, who finds his full realization only in the encounter with His creator. The road of life is towards the definitive encounter with the Lord.

The Book of Genesis affirms that man was created in the image and semblance of God, Who is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, a perfect relation of love that is unity. From this we can understand that we were all created to enter into a perfect relationship of love, in a continuous giving and receiving so as thus to find the fullness of our being.

When Moses, before the burning bush, received God's calling, he asked what His name was. And how did God answer? "I am Who I am" (*Ex 3: 14*). This expression, in its original sense, expresses *presence and favour*, and indeed immediately after God adds, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (*v. 15*). In this way Christ too, when He calls to His disciples, calls them to stay *with Him*. This, therefore, is the greatest grace: to be able to experience that the Mass, the Eucharist is the privileged moment for staying with Jesus and, through Him, with God and our brothers.

Praying, like any true dialogue, also means knowing how to stay in silence in dialogues there are moments of silence – in silence together with Jesus. And when we go to Mass, perhaps we arrive five minutes beforehand and begin to chat with the person next to us. But it is not the moment for chatter: it is the moment for silence, to prepare ourselves for the dialogue. It is the moment to collect ourselves in our heart to prepare for the dialogue with Jesus. Silence is so important. Remember what I said last week: we are not going to a show, we are going to an encounter with the Lord, and silence prepares us and accompanies us. Staying in silence together with Jesus. From the mysterious silence of God springs His Word, which resonates in our heart. Jesus Himself teaches us that it is truly possible to "stay" with the Father and He demonstrates this with His prayer. The Gospels show us Jesus Who withdraws to secluded places to pray; the disciples, seeing this intimate relation of His with the Father, feel the desire to be able to participate, and they ask Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (*Lk 11: 1*). We heard this in the first reading, at the beginning of the audience. Jesus answers that the first thing necessary to pray is to be able to say "Father". Beware: if I am not able to say "Father" to God, I am not capable of praying. We must learn to say, "Father", that is, to place oneself in His presence with filial confidence. But to be able to learn, it is necessary to recognize humbly that we need to be instructed, and to say with simplicity: Lord, teach me to pray.

This is the first point: to be humble, to recognize ourselves as children, to repose in the Father, to trust in Him. To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must make ourselves small like children. In the sense that children know how to trust, they know that someone will take care of them, of what they will eat, of what they will wear and so on (cf *Mt 6: 25-32*). This is the first attitude: *trust and confidence*, like children towards their parents; knowing that God remembers you and takes care of you, you, me, everyone.

The second predisposition, again typical of children, is to *allow oneself to be surprised*. The child always ask a thousand questions because he wants to discover the world; and he wonders even at little things, because everything is new to him. To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must allow ourselves to be astonished. In our relationship with the Lord, in prayer – I ask – do we allow ourselves to be astonished, or do we think that prayer is talking to God like parrots? No, it is trusting and opening the heart to wonder. Do we let ourselves be surprised by God, Who is always the God of surprises? Because the encounter with the Lord is always a living encounter, not a museum visit. It is a living encounter, and we go to Mass, not to a museum. Let us go to a living encounter with the Lord.

The Gospel speaks of a certain Nicodemus (*Jn 3: 1-21*), an elderly man, an authority in Israel, who goes to Jesus to meet Him; and the Lord speaks to him about the need to be "born again" (cf. *v. 3*). But what does this mean? Can one be "reborn"? To return to having the taste, the joy, the wonder of life, is it possible, even when faced with so many tragedies? This is a fundamental question of our faith, and this is the desire of every true believer: the desire to be reborn, the joy of starting over. Do we have this desire? Does each one of us have the wish to be reborn always, to encounter the Lord? Do you have this desire? Indeed, it can easily be lost because, as a result of many activities, of many projects to be put into practice, little time is left over and we lose sight of

what is fundamental: our life of the heart, our spiritual life, our life that is the encounter with the Lord in prayer.

In truth, the Lord surprises us by showing us that He loves us even in our weaknesses. “Jesus Christ ... is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2: 2). This gift, a source of true consolation – but the Lord forgives us always – this is a true consolation, it is a gift that is given to us through the Eucharist, that nuptial banquet in which the Spouse encounters our fragility. Can I say that when I take communion in the Mass, the Lord encounters my fragility? Yes! We can say this because it is true! The Lord encounters our fragility to restore us to our first calling: that of being the image and semblance of God. This is the environment of the Eucharist, this is prayer.

### **Greetings in various languages**

#### ***French***

I am glad to greet French-speaking pilgrims from Belgium, Switzerland and France, and in particular the young people of the *Notre Dame de Sion* College of Paris. May the Lord help you, through prayer and the Eucharist, to find the fullness of your being in the encounter with Him. God bless you.

#### ***English***

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from England, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Hong Kong 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 address a cordial greeting to German-speaking pilgrims. May the encounter with so many nations here in Rome, and the experience of the universal Church during this general audience edify you in communion and strengthen you in the spirit of love and service in favour of the poor, the sick and those most in need. May the Lord bless you and your families.

#### ***Spanish***

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular the crew of the Cantabrian Ship that provides its service in the Mediterranean in support of immigrants. I also greet groups from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you to partake in the Eucharist, to be with the Lord, to sit by His side and share your life with Him, listening to His Word that inflames our hearts.

#### ***Portuguese***

I address a cordial greeting to all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, from Portugal and Brazil. Dear friends, you are called to be witnesses of the joy of the world, transfigured by the merciful grace that Jesus gives us in the Holy Mass. May God's blessing descend upon you and your families.

#### ***Arabic***

I address a cordial greeting to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, the Mass is the nuptial banquet in which the Spouse encounters our fragility, to bring us back to our first calling. Let us allow the Lord to surprise us, showing us that He loves us even in our weakness. May the Lord bless you!

***Polish***

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, may your pilgrimage to Rome be a time of prayer, an opportunity to relive the witness of the faith of apostles and martyrs, and to grow in Christian love and hope, of which the Eucharist is the source and culmination. I bless you and your families. Praised be Jesus Christ!

***Italian***

A cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims!

I am pleased to welcome the Minor Friars Capuchin, who are meeting in Rome for the International Council for the Formation of the Order.

I greet parish groups, especially the faithful of Sant'Elpidio a Mare, San Michele Salentino and Fiumicino; the Coordination of Italian Associations for young people with diabetes, and the musical band of Reggio Calabria.

I address a special thought to young people, the sick and the newlyweds. Today we celebrate the memory of St. Albert the Great, bishop and Doctor of the Church. Dear young people, strengthen your dialogue with God, seeking Him with commitment in all your actions; dear people who are sick, find comfort in the reflection of the mystery of the cross of the Lord Jesus, which continues to enlighten the live of every man; and you, dear newlyweds, strive to maintain a constant relationship with Christ, so that your love may increasingly be a reflection of that of God.

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