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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.25 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall, 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 meaning of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus.

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 I would like to reflect with you on the significance of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus, which in these days we are living in faith and in celebrations.

The construction of the nativity scene and, above all, the liturgy, with its biblical readings and its traditional hymns, have enabled us to relive the "this day" in which "unto [us] is born ... a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2: 11).

In our times, especially in Europe, we witness a sort of “distortion” of Christmas: in the name of a false respect that is not Christian, which often hides the wish to marginalize faith, it eliminates from the celebration any reference to the birth of Jesus. But in reality this event is the only true Christmas! Without Jesus there is no Christmas; there is another festival, but not Christmas. And if in He is in the centre, then also the whole form, the lights, the sounds, the various local traditions, including the typical foods, all combine to create the atmosphere of a festival, but with Jesus at the centre. If we Him away, the light goes out and everything becomes fake and superficial.

Through the proclamation of the Church, we, like the shepherds of the Gospel (cf. *Lk 2: 9*), are guided to seek and find the true light, that of Jesus Who, made man like us, shows Himself in a surprising way: born of a poor unknown girl, who gives birth to Him in a stable, with only the help of her husband ... The world does not notice anything, but in heaven the angels who know of it exult! And this is how the Son of God presents Himself to us today: as the gift of God for humanity that is immersed in the night and in the torpor of sleep (cf. *Is 9: 1*). And even today we are witnessing the fact that humanity often prefers darkness because it knows that light would reveal all those actions and thoughts that would make us blush or tarnish the conscience. Thus, we prefer to stay in the dark so as not to upset our bad habits.

Then we can ask ourselves what it means to accept the gift of God Who is Jesus. As He Himself taught us with His life, it means becoming every day a free gift for those we meet on our own path every day. This is why at Christmas we exchange gifts. The true gift for us is Jesus, and like Him we want to be a gift for others. And since we want to be a gift to others, we exchange gifts, as a sign, as a sign of this attitude that Jesus teaches us: He, sent by the Father, was a gift for us, and we are gifts for others.

The apostle Paul offers us a succinct key to interpretation, when he writes – it is beautiful, this passage from Paul – “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (*Titus 2: 11-12*). The grace of God “appeared” in Jesus, the face of God, which the Virgin Mary gave birth to like every child in this world, but who did not come “from the earth”; He came “from Heaven”, from God. In this way, with the incarnation of the Son, God opened the way for new life, founded not on egoism but on love. The birth of Jesus is the greatest gesture of love of our Father in Heaven.

And finally, one last important aspect: in Christmas we can see how human history, moved by the powerful of this world, is visited by the history of God. And God involves those who, confined to the margins of society, are the first recipients of His gift, that is – the gift – the salvation brought by Jesus. With the least and the despised, Jesus establishes a friendship that continues in time and which nurtures hope for a better future. To these people, represented by the shepherds of Bethlehem, “a great light appeared” (*Lk 2: 9-12*). They were marginalized, they were frowned upon, despised, and the great news appeared to them first. With these people, with the least and the despised, Jesus establishes a friendship that continues in time and that nourishes the hope for a better future. To these people, represented by the shepherds of Bethlehem, appeared a great light, which led them straight to Jesus. With them, in every time, God wishes to build a new world, a world in which there are people are no longer refused, mistreated and destitute.

Dear brothers and sisters, in these days we open the mind and heart to receive this grace. Jesus is God’s gift for us and, if we welcome Him, we too can become so for others – to be a gift of God for others – and first for those who have never experienced care and tenderness. But how many people in their own life have never experienced a caress, the attention of love, a gesture of tenderness... Christmas drives us to do this. In this way Jesus is born again in the life of each one of us and, through us, continues to be a gift of salvation for the least and the excluded.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am glad to welcome French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the faithful from the diocese of Séez, with the bishop, Msgr. Jacques Habert, and families of the diocese of Cambrai. Dear friends, in this time of Christmas, may Jesus be born also in your lives and, through you, become a gift of salvation for the least and for the excluded. Happy Christmas, and may God bless you!

English

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's audience, particularly those from the United States of America. May each of you, and your families, cherish the joy of this Christmas season, and draw near in prayer to the Prince of Peace who has come to dwell among us. God bless you all!

German

I address a hearty welcome to German-speaking pilgrims. The Mystery of Christmas must also find a place in each one of us, as the *Cherubic Pilgrim* said: "Ah, would thy heart but be a manger for the birth, God would once more become a child on earth". May the Lord guide us to bring His peace and His love to men and women of our time.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Spain and Latin America. In these days I encourage you to open your mind and heart to welcome Jesus, Who is God's gift for us, and if we welcome Him we can become so for others, especially for those in need of attention and care.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, I wish to you and your families a truly Christian Christmas, so that the wishes of "Happy Holidays" exchanged between you may be an expression of the joy we feel in knowing that God is present in our midst and that He walks with us. To all of you I wish to offer wishes for a happy New Year, full of the blessings of the Child God.

Arabic

I cordially greet Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from Syria, Iraq, the Holy Land and the Middle East. The birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of the divine promises. God does not love in words: His love is not limited to the sending of prophets, messengers or texts, but He brings Him to embrace our weakness and our human condition to raise us up to our lost filial dignity. The incarnation of God is the sure proof of the authenticity of His love. He who truly loves identifies with the beloved. May the Lord bless you, and many wishes for a glorious Christmas and a happy new year!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, in these days we open the mind and the heart to receive the gift of love of God Who is Jesus, His Son born of the Virgin Mary. If we receive him in our daily life, then we too can become a gift for others. I thank you for the Christmas wishes from Poland and from all the world, and above all for the prayers following my intentions. I beg you to remember me always, before the Lord. I bless you heartily!

Italian

I welcome with the joy of the atmosphere of Christmas the dear Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet the artists and workers of the Golden Circus of Liana Orfei, and I thank them for their show. Circus art, like beauty, always

brings us close to God! And you, with your work, with your art, bring the people closer to God. Thank you for what you do!

I greet the *Confraternità Santissima Annunziata* in Panza, Ischia, on the fourth centenary of their founding, the group from the Paediatrics department of the Hospital of Padua and parish groups, especially the faithful from Gromlongo di Palazzago, Vignanello, Aprilia, Curno and Catanzaro. In this Christmas time we have before our eyes the wonderful mystery of Jesus, God's gift to all humanity. Without Jesus, remember, it is not Christmas, it is something else.

I am happy to give a special greeting to the young, the sick and newlyweds. Dear young people, know how to be strong in faith, looking at the divine Child, Who in the mystery of Christmas offers Himself as a gift to all humanity. Dear people who are sick, I hope you will glimpse, in the vivid light of Bethlehem, the meaning of your suffering. And I exhort you newlyweds to keep constant, in raising your family, love and dedication above all sacrifice.
