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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Appeal of the Holy Father

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 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 his recently concluded Apostolic Trip to the United Arab Emirates (Bible passage: from the *Book of Genesis* 9: 1-5).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then invited those present to pray for the migrants from Haiti shipwrecked near the Bahamas.

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!

Over the last few days I made a brief apostolic trip to the United Arab Emirates. A brief but very important trip that, in connection with the 2017 meeting in Al-Azhar, Egypt, wrote a new page in the history of dialogue

between Christianity and Islam and in the commitment to promoting peace in the world on the basis of human brotherhood.

For the first time, a Pope went to the Arabian Peninsula. And Providence wished him to be a Pope by the name of Francis, eight hundred years after Saint Francis of Assisi's visit to the sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. I often thought of Saint Francis during this journey: he helped me to keep the Gospel, the love of Jesus Christ in my heart, while I was living the various moments of the visit; in my heart there was the Gospel of Christ, prayer to the Father for all His children, especially for the poorest, for the victims of injustices, wars, misery; prayer that dialogue between Christianity and Islam may be a decisive factor for peace in today's world.

I offer heartfelt thanks to the Crown Prince, the president, the vice president and all the authorities of the United Arab Emirates, who welcomed me with great courtesy. The country has grown a lot in the last decades: it has become a crossroads between East and West, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious "oasis", and therefore a place well suited to promoting the culture of encounter. I gladly acknowledge Bishop Paul Hinder, vicar apostolic of Southern Arabia, who prepared and organized the event for the Catholic community, and my thanks extend with affection to the priests, religious and laypersons who inspire the Christian presence in that land.

I had the opportunity to greet the first priest – ninety years old – who had gone there to found many communities. He is in a wheelchair, blind, but his smile never fails, the smile of having served the Lord and of having done great good. I also greeted another priest in his nineties – but this one was walking and still working – bravo! – and many other priests who are there in the service of the Christian communities of Latin rite, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankarite, Maronite rite, who come from Lebanon, India, the Philippines and other countries.

Aside from the speeches, in Abu Dhabi another step was taken: the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and I signed the *Document on Human Fraternity*, in which together we affirm the common vocation of all men and women to be brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we are sons and daughters of God; we condemn every form of violence, especially when disguised with religious motivations, and we commit ourselves to spreading authentic values and peace in the world. This document will be studied in the schools and universities of many countries. But I too recommend that you read it, that you know it, because it provides impetus to advance in dialogue on human brotherhood.

In an age such as ours, in which there is a strong temptation to see a clash between Christian and Islamic civilizations, and also to consider religions as a source of conflict, we wished to offer a further sign, clear and decisive, that instead it is possible to encounter each other, to respect each other and to engage in dialogue, and that, despite the diversity of cultures and traditions, the Christian and Islamic worlds appreciate and safeguard common values: life, family, religious meaning, honour to the elderly, the education of the young, and more.

Just over a million *Christians* live in the United Arab Emirates: workers originally from various countries in Asia. Yesterday morning I met a representation of the Catholic community in Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Abu Dhabi – a very simple temple – and then, after this meeting, I celebrated for all. There were many of them! They say that among those inside the stadium, which has capacity for forty thousand, and those in front of the screens outside the stadium, there were 150 thousand! I celebrated the Eucharist in the city stadium, proclaiming the Gospel of the Beatitudes. In the *Mass*, concelebrated with the patriarchs, the major archbishops and the bishops present, we prayed in a special way for peace and justice, with special intention for the Middle East and for Yemen.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Trip belongs to God's "surprises". Let us therefore praise Him and His providence, and let us pray that the seeds sown may bring fruit according to His will.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am pleased to greet pilgrims from France and the various Francophone countries, in particular the seminarians and teachers of the Seminary of Nantes, as well as the young people of Marseilles and Paris. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us promote a true culture of encounter, and, as sons and daughters of God, to make fraternity grow among men, with respect, dialogue and prayer.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from England and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

German

I cordially greet German-speaking pilgrims. Let us pray to the Father of humanity, that He grant peace to the world and make us all grow in awareness of the brotherhood between men.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, particularly the groups from Spain and Latin America. When I entered I saw that there were many Andalusians, who know how to make noise! Let us thank the Lord for this moment of grace that was the trip to the United Arab Emirates, and let us pray that fraternity may grow among all believers in God, as well as between believers and non-believers, and all people of good will. Thank you.

Portuguese

I cordially greet Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the faithful of São José dos Campos. I hope you may always carry love of Jesus in your hearts, like Francis of Assisi, and the prayer to the heavenly Father for all His children, especially for those who do not know peace. May God's blessing descend upon you and your families!

Arabic

I address a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from the Middle East. On the good terrain of the United Arab Emirates, the seed of human fraternity was sown. Let us ask God to make it grow, bear fruit and become a tree that embraces all. May the Lord bless all the people who made this apostolic trip possible.

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Brothers and sisters, meetings with people of different continents, cultures and religions, such as those of the United Arab Emirates, make us aware of how important peace, dialogue and brotherhood among men are for the world. The measure of such aspects in the life of each one of us are: peace with oneself, with our neighbour, and with the created world. In the spirit of the motto of the just-concluded trip, let us ask God, in our daily prayer, to "make me an instrument of peace". May Jesus Christ be praised.

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking faithful.

I am pleased to welcome the bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Basilicata, accompanied by the metropolitan, Msgr. Salvatore Ligorio, and the Chinese priests and religious in Rome attending a course.

I greet the group of Italian scientific journalists and school groups, in particular the St. John the Baptist School in Rome and the class of students of the “Pier Paolo Pasolini” High School in Potenza.

I greet the delegation of the Pharmaceutical Bank Foundation that on Saturday 9 February, in Italian pharmacies, will collect drugs for economically disadvantaged people.

I address a special thought to the young, the sick and newlyweds. I hope that, for all of you, your visit to the Eternal City may encourage you to know better the Word of God, in order to announce that Jesus is our Saviour and our true peace.

Appeal of the Holy Father

Last Saturday, near the archipelago of the Bahamas, a boat sank with dozens of migrants from Haiti on board, in search of hope and a future of peace. My affectionate thoughts go to the suffering families, as well as to the Haitian people, afflicted by this new tragedy. I invite you to join in my prayer for those who dramatically lost their lives, and for the injured.
