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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in Saint 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 resumed his cycle of catechesis on *Discernment*, focusing on the theme: "*Consolation*" (Bible reading: Ps 62:2-3, 6).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present. He then turned his attention to the victims of the earthquake that struck the Island of Java, Indonesia, on Monday; he recalled Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli, beatified last Sunday in Kalongo, Uganda; he greeted the participants in the World Football Championship being held in Qatar; and finally, he made a first appeal to "martyred" Ukraine, recalling the Holodomor genocide and a second appeal on the occasion of World Fisheries Day, celebrated last Monday, 21 November.

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!

We continue the catechesis on the discernment of spirits and how to discern them when they take place in our hearts and in our souls. After having considered several aspects of desolation – that darkness in the soul – today let us talk about *consolation* – which is light in the soul and another important element in discernment, which is not to be taken for granted, because it can lend itself to misunderstandings. We must understand what consolation is, just as we have tried to understand well what desolation is.

What is spiritual consolation? It is an experience of *interior joy*, consisting in seeing God's presence in

everything. It strengthens faith and hope, and even the ability of doing good. The person who experiences consolation never gives up in the face of difficulties because he or she always experiences a peace that is stronger than any trial. It is, therefore, a tremendous gift for the spiritual life as well as life in general...and to live this interior joy.

Consolation is an interior movement that touches our depths. It is not flashy but soft, delicate, like a drop of water on a sponge (cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 335). The person feels enveloped in God's presence in a way that always respects his or her own freedom. It is never something out of tune, that tries to force our will; neither is it a passing euphoria. On the contrary, as we have seen, even the suffering – caused for example by our own sins – can become a reason for consolation.

Let's recall the experience Saint Augustine lived when he spoke with his mother Monica about the beauty of eternal life; or of the perfect joy of Saint Francis that was associated with very difficult situations he had to bear; and let's think of the many saints who were able to do great things not because they thought they were magnificent or capable, but because they had been conquered by the peaceful sweetness of God's love. This is the *peace* that Saint Ignatius discovered in himself with such amazement when he would read the lives of the saints. To be consoled is to be at peace with God, to feel that everything is settled in peace, everything is in harmony within us. This is the peace that Edith Stein felt after her conversion. A year after she received Baptism, she wrote – this is what Edith Stein says: “As I abandon myself to this feeling, little by little a new life begins to fill me and – without any pressure on my will – to drive me toward new realizations. This living inpouring seems to spring from an activity and a strength that is not mine and which, without doing me any violence, becomes active in me” (*Psicologia e scienze dello spirito*, Città Nuova, 1996, 116). So, genuine peace is one that makes good feelings blossom in us.

Above all, consolation affects *hope*, and reaches out toward the future, puts us on a journey, allows us to take the initiative that had always been postponed or not even imagined, such as Baptism was for Edith Stein.

Consolation is that type of peace, but not that we remain sitting there enjoying it, no.... It gives you peace and draws you toward the Lord and sets you off to do things, to do good things. In a moment of consolation, when we are consoled, we want to do so much good, always. Instead, when there is a moment of desolation, we feel like closing in on ourselves and doing nothing.... Consolation pushes us forward in service to others, society, other people.

Spiritual consolation is not “piloted” – you cannot say now that consolation will come – no, it is not it cannot be “piloted”, programmed at will. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It allows a *familiarity with God* that seems to cancel distances. When she visited the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome at the age of fourteen, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus tried to touch the nail venerated there, one of the nails with which Jesus was crucified. Therese understood her daring as a transport of love and confidence. Later, she wrote, “I truly was too audacious. But the Lord sees the depths of our hearts. He knows my intention was pure [...] I acted with him as a child who believes everything is permissible and who considers the Father's treasures their own” (*Autobiographical Manuscript*, 183). Consolation is spontaneous. Consolation leads you to do everything spontaneously, as if we were children. Children are spontaneous, and consolation leads you to be spontaneous with a tenderness, with a very deep peace. A fourteen-year-old girl gives us a splendid description of spiritual consolation. We can feel a sense of tenderness toward God that makes us audacious in our desire to participate in his own life, to do what is pleasing to him because we feel familiar with him, we feel that his house is our house, we feel welcome, loved, restored. With this consolation, we do not give up in the face of difficulty – in fact, with the same boldness, Therese would ask the Pope for permission to enter Carmel even though she was too young, and her wish was granted. What does this mean? It means that consolation makes us daring. When we find ourselves in a moment of darkness, of desolation, we think: “I am not capable of doing this, no....” Desolation brings you down. Everything is dark.... “No, I cannot do this...I will not do it”. Instead, in times of consolation, the same things – “No, I am going ahead. I will do it”. “But are you sure?” “I feel God's strength and I am going ahead”. And so, consolation pushes you to go ahead and to do those things that you would not be capable of doing in a moment of; it pushes you to take the first step. This is what is beautiful about consolation.

But let's be careful. We must distinguish well between the consolation that comes from God and *false consolations*. Something similar happens in the spiritual life that happens in human productions: there are originals and there are imitations. If an authentic consolation is like a drop on a sponge, is soft and intimate, its imitations are noisier and flashier, they are pure enthusiasm, like straw fires, lacking substance, leading us to close in on ourselves and not to take care of others. In the end, false consolation leaves us empty, far from the centre of our existence. For this reason, when we feel happy, at peace, we are capable of doing anything. But let's not confuse that peace with passing enthusiasm because there's enthusiasm today, but then it is taken away and is no more.

This is why we have to *discern* even when we feel consoled. False consolation can become a danger if we seek it obsessively as an end in itself, forgetting the Lord. As Saint Bernard would say, this is seeking the consolations of God rather than the God of consolations. We need to seek the Lord, and the Lord consoles us with his presence. He consoles us, makes us move forward. And we should not seek God who brings us consolations here below: No, this is not right, we should not be interested in this. This is the dynamic of the child whom we spoke about last time who looks for his or parents only to get something, but doesn't look for them – he or she is seeking their own interests. “Daddy, Mamma” – children know how to do this, they know how to play...and when the family is divided, and they are accustomed to going to one and going to the other, this is not good, this is not consolation, but personal interest. We too run the risk of living our relationship with God in a childish way, seeking our own interests, of reducing it to an object that we use and consume, losing the most beautiful gift which is God Himself. So, let us move forward in our lives that progress between the consolations from God and the desolations from the sin of the world, but knowing how to distinguish when it is a consolation from God that brings peace to the depths of your soul, from a passing enthusiasm, which is not bad, but which is not a consolation from God.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially those from the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of Christ our Lord. God bless you!

Appeals of the Holy Father

In the past few hours, the island of Java in Indonesia was hit by a strong earthquake. I express my nearness to that dear population and I pray for the dead and the injured.

This past Sunday, Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli was beatified in Kalongo, Uganda. He was a Comboni missionary, priest and doctor, born in the Diocese of Como, who died in Uganda in 1987 after having spent his life for the sick in whom he saw Christ's face. May his extraordinary witness help each one of us to be worthy of a Church on the move. A round of applause for the new Blessed!

I would like to send my greetings to the athletes, fans and spectators who are following the football World Championship taking place in Qatar. May this important event be an occasion for encounter and harmony among the nations, fostering fraternity and peace among peoples. Let us pray for peace in the world, and for an end to all conflicts, with a special thought for the terrible suffering of the dear and martyred people of Ukraine. And let us think of war-torn Ukraine. This Saturday is the anniversary of the terrible Holodomor genocide, the extermination by hunger in 1932-33 artificially caused by Stalin. Let us pray for the victims of this genocide and let us pray for all Ukrainians, the children, the women and the elderly, the babies who are today suffering the martyrdom of aggression.

May World Fisheries Day, celebrated yesterday, foster the sustainability of fishing and aquaculture through

respect for the rights of the people who fish, who through their work contribute to food security, nutrition and to reducing poverty in the world.
