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General audience: hope does not disappoint

In the catechesis of this Wednesday's general audience, Pope Francis returned to the theme of hope, this time in the light of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, in which he urges them to be proud. But what does this refer to? As the Holy Father remarked, "Since childhood we are taught that it is not good to boast. And it is right, because boasting of what one is or what one has betrays, aside from a certain arrogance, also a lack of respect for others, especially those who are less fortunate than ourselves". What, then, is it right to be proud of? And how is it possible to do this, without offending, without excluding anyone?

In the first case, we are invited to be proud of "the abundance of grace with which we are pervaded in Jesus Christ, through faith. Paul wants to make us understand that, if we learn to interpret everything with the light of the Holy Spirit, we realise that everything is grace, everything is a gift! Indeed, if we pay attention, we see that – in history, as in our life – we are not alone in acting; there is, above all, God ... Who creates every thing as a gift of love, Who weaves the fabric of His plan for salvation and Who fulfils it for us, through His Son Jesus. We are requested to recognise all this, to welcome it with gratitude and to make it become a reason for praise, blessing and great joy. If we do this, we are at peace with God and we experience freedom. And this peace then extends to all environments and all the relationships of our life: we are at peace with ourselves, we are at peace in the family, in our community, at work and with the people we meet every day on our journey".

But Paul also encourages us to be proud even in our troubles, which is more difficult for us and can seem to have nothing to do with the condition of peace I have just described. "Instead it constitutes the most authentic and truest presupposition", Francis emphasised. "Indeed, the peace that the Lord offers and guarantees to us must not be understood as a lack of worries, disappointments, scarcity, or reasons for suffering. If it were thus, if we succeeded in staying at peace, that moment would soon come to an end and we would inevitably return to dejection. The peace that springs from faith is instead a gift: it is the grace of experiencing that God loves us and that He is always by our side, and that He never leaves us alone even for a moment of our life. And this, as the Apostle affirms, gives rise to patience, because we know that even in the hardest and most troubling moments, the Lord's mercy and goodness are greater than any other thing and nothing can tear us from His hands and from communion with Him".

This, then, is why "Christian hope is solid, and this is why it does not disappoint. It is not based on what we can do or be, or even on what we can believe in. Its foundation, that is the basis of Christian hope, is the most faithful

and secure possible; that is, the love that God Himself has for each one of us. It is easy to say: God loves us, we all say this", commented the Holy Father. "But think a little: every one of us is capable of saying: I am sure that God loves me. It is not so easy to say it, but it is true. It is a good exercise to say to ourselves: God loves me. It is the root of our security, the root of hope. And the Lord has poured His Spirit, which is God's love, abundantly into our hearts, as creator, as guarantor, precisely so as to nurture faith within us and to keep this hope alive. God loves me. 'But in this horrible moment? God loves me. I, who have done these bad things? God loves me'. No-one This can take this security away from us. And we must repeat it like a prayer: God loves me. I am sure that God loves me. I am sure that God loves me".

"Now we understand why the Apostle Paul urges us always to be proud of all this. 'I glory in God's love, because He loves me'. The hope that is given to us does not separate us from others, nor does it lead us to discredit them or marginalise them", the Holy Father explained. "It is instead an extraordinary gift for which we are called to be channels, with humility and simplicity, for everyone. And therefore our greatest pride will be having as a Father a God Who does not have preferences, Who excludes no-one, but Who opens His house to all human beings, starting from the last and the most distance, so that as His children we learn to console and support each other. And do not forget: hope never disappoints".
