



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Holy Father's appeals

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.25 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 his meditation on Christian hope on the theme "Giving a reason for the hope that is in us" (cfr *1Pt* 3,8-17).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then made two appeals, following the attack in St. Petersburg and the most recent massacre in Syria.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The First Letter of the apostle Peter is extraordinarily rich. We must read it once, twice, three times to

understand its extraordinary import: it succeeds in bringing great consolation and peace, showing how the Lord is always by our side and never abandons us, especially in the most delicate and difficult times of our lives. But what is the “secret” of this Letter, and in particular of the passage we have just listened to (cf. 1 Pt. 3:8-17)? This is a question. I know that you will take the New Testament, look for the First Letter of Peter and read it very slowly, to understand the secret and the strength of this Letter. What is the secret of this Letter?

1. The secret resides in the fact that this text is rooted directly in Easter, in the heart of the mystery we are about to celebrate, thus allowing us to perceive all the light and joy that spring from the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ is truly risen, and this is a beautiful greeting we can give each other on the day of Easter: “Christ is risen! Christ is risen!”, as many peoples do. Let us remember that Christ is risen, He lives in our midst, and abides in each one of us. This is why St. Peter strongly urges us to adore Him in our hearts (cf. v. 16). There the Lord made His dwelling at the moment of our Baptism, and from there He continues to renew us and our life, filling us with His love and with fullness of Spirit. This is why the Apostle reminds us to acknowledge the hope that is in us (cf. v. 16): our hope is not a concept, it is not a sentiment, it is not a mobile phone, it is not a heap of riches! Our hope is a Person, it is the Lord Jesus Whom we recognise as living and present in us and in our brothers, because Christ is risen. Slavic peoples, when they greet each other, instead of saying “Good morning” or “Good evening” on the days of Easter, they greet each other with this “Christ is risen!”. “*Christos voskrese!*”, they say to each other, and they are happy to say so! And this is the “Good morning” and “Good evening” they offer one another: “Christ is risen!”

2. We understand, then, that we cannot give a reason for this hope at a theoretical level, but above all through the witness of life, both within the Christian community and outside it. If Christ is living and abides in us, in our heart, then we must also allow Him to be made visible, not to hide Him, and to act in us. This means that the Lord Jesus must increasingly become our model: our model of life and that we must learn to behave as He behaved. Do what Jesus did. The hope that abides in us, then, cannot remain hidden inside us, in our heart: it would be a weak hope, that does not have the courage to come out and let itself be seen; but our hope, as is clear in the Psalm 33 cited by Peter, must necessarily be released outwards, taking the exquisite and unmistakeable form of gentleness, respect and goodness towards our neighbour, to the point of forgiving those who do us harm. A person who does not have hope is not able to forgive; he is not able to give the consolation of forgiveness and to receive the consolation of forgiveness. Yes, because this is what Jesus did, and in this way He continues to do so through those who make space in their heart and their life for Him, in the awareness that evil is not vanquished with evil, but with humility, mercy and gentleness. Mafiosi think that evil can be defeated with evil, and so they seek revenge and do all those things we know about. But they do not know what humility, mercy and gentleness are. And why? Because Mafiosi do not have hope. Think about this.

3. This is why St. Peter affirms that “it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil” (v. 17); this does not mean that it is good to suffer, but that when we suffer for good, we are in communion with the Lord, Who accepted to suffer and to be put on the cross for our salvation. So when, in the smallest or the largest situations of our life, we too accept suffering for good, it is as if we sprinkled the seeds of resurrection, the seeds of life around us, and made the light of Easter shine in the dark. This is why the Apostle urges us always to respond “blessing” (v. 9): blessing is not a formality, or merely a sign of courtesy, but rather a great gift that we are the first to have received, and that we have the possibility of sharing with our brothers. It is the proclamation of God's love, a love without bounds, that is inexhaustible, that never runs out and constitutes the true basis for our hope.

Dear friends, we understand also why the apostle Peter calls us “blessed”, when we must suffer for justice (cf. v. 13). It is not only for a moral or ascetic reason, but it is because each time we take the side of the last and the marginalized, or that we do not respond to evil with evil, but instead forgive without vengeance, forgiving and blessing, every time we do this we shine as living and luminous signs of hope, thus becoming an instrument of consolation and peace, in accord with the heart of God. And in this way we go ahead with sweetness and gentleness, being amiable and doing good even to those who do not wish us well, or who harm us. Onwards!

Greetings in various languages

French

I am happy to greet French-speaking pilgrims, in particular the young college and high school students and the faithful from the parishes who have come here from France and Belgium. May the Lord, risen and living in our hearts, help us to be luminous signs of the love with which God has filled us, and of the hope that is in us, for everyone, and in particular for the small and the poor. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from England, Ireland, Denmark, The Netherlands, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Korea, Vietnam and the United States of America. I offer a particular greeting to the priests of the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College. May this Lenten journey bring us to Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon you and your families I invoke joy and peace in Christ our Redeemer. God bless you all!

German

A warm welcome to pilgrims from the German-speaking nations, as well as from the Netherlands. I greet the young people and school groups, especially the *Kardinal-von-Galen-Schule* of *Telgte* and the *Maria-Ward-Realschule* of *Neuburg an der Donau*. May the Holy Week celebrations help us renew our Paschal faith and bring hope in the Risen Christ to our neighbours. God bless you and your loved ones.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, in particular the groups from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you to live intensely the days of Holy Week. May the contemplation of the Passion and death of Jesus assure the hope of our resurrection, and help us to be instruments of His consolation and love for all our brothers. God bless you.

Portuguese

I address a special greeting to all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the faithful of *Estrela* and the students of *Perafita*. Dear friends, may faith in the Resurrection drive us to look towards the future, strengthened in the hope of Christ's victory over sin and death, which we celebrate at Easter. God bless you!

Arabic

I address a warm welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East. Dear brothers

and sisters, every time we take the side of the last and the marginalized, or we do not respond to evil with evil, but instead forgive and bless, we shine as living and luminous signs of hope, thus becoming instruments of consolation and peace, following God's heart. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet the compatriots of John Paul II present here. In the first days of April we remember his return to the house of the Father. He was a great witness of Christ, a zealous defender of the legacy of faith. He gave the two great messages of Merciful Jesus and Fatima to the world. The first was remembered during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy; the second, regarding the triumph over evil of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is recalled to us on the centenary of the apparitions at Fatima. Let us receive those messages so that they pervade our hearts and so we open the doors to Christ. Jesus Christ be praised!

Italian

I extend a warm welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet the families of soldiers who have fallen in international peace missions, accompanied by the Military Ordinary Msgr. Santo Marciànò; the Rwandan community in Italy and the National Order of Agronomists and Forest Experts.

I greet the participants in the Convention organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture, encouraging them to reflect on the future of humanity in the light of the medical sciences and perennial moral values. I greet the Pope John XXIII Community, and while I urge you to continue your work in assisting young woman rescued from prostitution, I invite Romans to participate in the Via Crucis for the crucified women, to take place on Friday 7 April in Garbatella.

Finally, I address a special thought to the young, the sick and newly-weds. Today we remember St. Vincent Ferrer, a Dominican priest. Dear young people, from his school learn to speak with God and of God, avoiding pointless or harmful talk; dear sick people, learn from his spiritual experience to trust in the crucified Christ in every situation; dear newly-weds, seek his intercession to assume your mission as parents with generous commitment.

Holy Father's appeals

My thoughts turn in this moment to the grave attack in recent days on the metro network of St. Petersburg, which claimed victims and caused disquiet in the population. While I entrust to the mercy of God those who tragically died, I express my spiritual closeness to their relatives and to all those who suffer as a result of this dramatic event.

We have witnessed in horror the most recent events in Syria. I express my strong condemnation of the unacceptable massacre that took place in the province of Idlib, where dozens of civilians were killed, including many children. I pray for the victims and their families, and I appeal to the conscience of those with political responsibility, at local and international level, to put an end to this tragedy and to bring relief to that dear population, for too long afflicted by war. Likewise I encourage the efforts of those who, in conditions of insecurity and discomfort, seek to convey aid to the inhabitants of the region.

