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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 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 on the theme "The Mother of Hope" (cf. John 19:25-27).

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!

In our catechesis on Christian hope, today we look to Mary, Mother of hope. Mary went through more than one dark night on her journey as a mother. From her earliest appearance in the history of the Gospels, she stands out as if she were a character in a drama. It was not easy to answer "yes" to the angel's invitation: yet she, a woman still in the flower of youth, answers with courage, despite knowing nothing about the fate that awaited her. Mary at that moment appears to us like one of the many mothers of our world, brave to the extreme when it comes to welcoming in her womb the story of a new person to be born.

That “yes” is the first step in a long list of acts of obedience – a long list of acts of obedience! – who will accompany her mother's itinerary. So Mary appears in the Gospels as a silent woman who often does not understand all that is happening around her but ponders every word and every event in her heart.

In this arrangement there is a beautiful outline of Maria's psychology: she is not a woman who is discouraged by the uncertainties of life, especially when nothing seems to go in the right direction. Nor is she a woman who protests with violence, who inveighs against the destiny in life that often reveals a hostile face. Instead, she is a woman who listens: do not forget that there is always a great relationship between hope and listening, and Mary is a woman who listens. Mary welcomes existence just as it is given to us, with its happy days, but also with its tragedies we would never have wished to encounter. Up to the supreme night of Mary, when her Son is nailed to the wood of the cross.

Until that day, Mary had almost disappeared from the story of the Gospels: the sacred writers leave implicit this slow eclipse of her presence, her remaining silent faced with the mystery of a Son Who obeys His Father. But Mary reappears precisely at that crucial moment, when a good number of His friends have fled out of fear. Mothers do not betray, and at that moment, at the foot of the cross, none of us can say what was cruellest passion: that of an innocent man who dies on the scaffold of the cross, or the agony of a mother who witnesses the last moments of her son's life. The Gospels are laconic, and extremely discreet. They record in a simple verb the presence of the Mother: she “stood” (John 19:25). She was standing. They say nothing of her reaction: whether or not she wept... nothing; not even a brushstroke to describe her grief: the imagination of poets and painters were to seize upon these details, giving us images that have entered the history of art and literature. But the Gospels just say, she was “standing”. She was there, in the worst moment, in the cruellest moment, and suffered with her son. “She stood”.

Mary “stood”, she was simply there. Here she is again, the young woman of Nazareth, now with her hair greyed by the passing of the years, still coming to grips with a God who must only be embraced, and with a life that has reached the threshold of the deepest darkness. Mary “stood” in the deepest darkness, but she “stood”, she stayed. She did not go away. Mary is there, faithfully present, every time that there needs to be a lighted candle in a place of mist and fog. Not even she knows the destiny of resurrection that her Son was at that instead opening up for all humanity: she is there out of fidelity to God's plan, to which she proclaimed herself a servant in the first day of her vocation, but also due to her instinct as a mother who simply suffers, every time that there is a son who goes through a passion. The sufferings of mothers: we have all known strong women, who have faced so many sufferings for their children!

We find her again in the first day of the Church, she, mother of hope, in the midst of that community of disciples, so fragile: one had renounced, many had fled, and all had been afraid (cf. Acts 1:14). But she was simply there, in the most normal of ways, as if it were something entirely natural: in the first Church enveloped in the light of the Resurrection, but also in the tremors of the first steps that she needed to take in the world.

This is why we all love her as a Mother. We are not orphans: we have a Mother in heaven, Who is the Holy Mother of God. Because she teaches us the virtue of waiting, even when everything seems to be without meaning; she is always trustful in the mystery of God, even when He seems to be eclipsed by the evil in the world. In moments of difficulty, may Mary, the Mother who Jesus gave to all of us, always be able to sustain our steps, may she always be able to say to our heart, “Arise! Look ahead, look to the horizon”, because she is the Mother of hope. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am happy to greet French-speaking pilgrims, especially young people from the colleges and the faithful of parishes from France and Belgium. May Mary, Mother of hope, support our steps in difficult times. May she help

us keep our trust in the love of God, both in happy days and more painful ones. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Finland, Mainland China, Indonesia, Taiwan, India, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

German

A warm welcome to German-speaking pilgrims, especially the various school groups. Let us make the most of this month of May to encounter Mary, our Mother, more often in prayer. She guides us to her Son Jesus Christ and is close to us with her maternal protection. I invite you to join in prayer for my Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fátima.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims. Today we celebrate the feast day of St. John of Ávila, patron of the Spanish clergy and master of spiritual life. Let us pray for all priests, that they may always be a clear image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and may the Virgin Mary sustain them throughout their priestly life. God bless you. Many thanks.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese pilgrims, I greet you all, especially the faithful of Belo Horizonte and the *Obra de Maria* group. On Friday and Saturday - God willing - I will travel to Fátima, to entrust to Our Lady the temporal and eternal destiny of humanity and to pray for the blessings of Heaven on its paths. I ask everyone to join me as pilgrims of hope and peace: your hands in prayer continue to support me. May the greatest and best of Mothers watch over each one of you, for all your days unto eternity!

Arabic

I cordially welcome Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Iraq, Jordan and the Middle East. The Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, teaches us that all the darkness of the world can not extinguish the light of the candle of hope when it is fuelled by faith and trust in God, Who never disappoints. May the Lord bless you all and protect you from the evil one!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish people here in Rome. Last Monday you celebrated in your homeland the solemnity of St. Stanislaus, bishop and martyr, and patron of Poland. In the image of the "Good Shepherd", defending evangelical values and moral order, he sacrificed his life for his sheep and shed the blood of martyrdom. May his example be for all of us an encouragement to be able to be faithful to Christ, His Cross, and the Gospel, in every situation of life. I entrust to your prayer my imminent pilgrimage to Fátima, and I bless you all. Jesus Christ be praised.

Russian

I heartily greet the delegation of young priests from the Patriarchate of Moscow, guests of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Almighty God, by the intercession of the Mother of God, bless our Country and the commitment of the Orthodox Russian Church for the dialogue between religions and the common good.

Italian

I cordially welcome Italian pilgrims. I greet participants in the ecumenical week promoted by the *Focolari* Movement and urge them to continue on their common path of unity, dialogue and friendship between religions and peoples.

I am pleased to welcome the faithful of Ischia, accompanied by Bishop Pietro Lagnese, and those of Andria and Marano di Napoli, as well as participants in the Family Business Network meeting, promoted by the dicastery for integral human development. I greet the presidents of the Taekwondo World and Italian Federation; the European Association of International Studies; participants in the Hydrae Course; the Sassari Brigade and the *Raggruppamento Lazio Umbria e Abruzzo dell'Operazione Strade Sicure* (Lazio, Umbria and Abruzzo Group of Safe Road Operations), whom I thank for their security service also in the vicinity of Vatican City and the Papal Basilicas. I encourage you all to live well this time of Easter in your families and work environments, bringing, with the enthusiasm of missionary disciples, the joy of the Resurrection.

I address a special thought to young people, the sick and the newlyweds. Next Saturday will be the centenary of the apparitions to the three pastors of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Fátima. Dear young people, learn to cultivate devotion to the Mother of God, with the daily recitation of the Rosary; dear sick people, feel the presence of Mary in the hour of the cross; and you, dear newly-weds, pray that love and mutual respect may never be lacking in your home.
