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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 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 focused on his recent apostolic trip to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (Bible passage: from Psalm 126, 1-6).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then launched an appeal on the occasion of the signing of a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the appointment of bishops in China, which took place in Beijing on 22 September.

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 recent days I went on an apostolic trip to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, on the occasion of the centenary of the independence of these, the so-called Baltic states. A hundred years, half of which they lived under the yoke of occupations, first the Nazi and then the Soviet occupation. They are peoples who have suffered greatly, and for this reason the Lord looks upon them with special favour. I am sure of this. I thank the Presidents of the three Republics and the civil authorities for the exquisite reception I received. I thank the bishops and all those who collaborated in preparing and realizing this ecclesial event.

My visit took place in a very different context to that which Saint John Paul II encountered; therefore my mission was to once again announce to those peoples *the joy of the Gospel and the revolution of tenderness*, of mercy, as freedom is not enough to give meaning and fullness to live without love, love that always comes from God. The Gospel, which in times of trial gives strength and inspires the fight for freedom, *in the time of freedom is the light* for the daily path of people, of families and of societies, and is the *salt* that gives flavour to ordinary life and preserves it from the corruption of mediocrity and selfishness.

In Lithuania Catholics are the majority, while in Latvia and Estonia Lutherans and Orthodox prevail, but many have drifted away from the religious life. Therefore the challenge is that of *strengthening communion between all Christians*, already developed during the tough period of the persecution. In effect, the *ecumenical dimension* was intrinsic to this trip, and found expression in the moment of prayer in the Cathedral of Riga and in the meeting with young people in Tallinn.

In addressing the respective Authorities of the three countries, I placed emphasis on the contribution that they give to the community of nations and especially to Europe: a contribution of human and social values that have passed through the crucible of hardship. I encouraged dialogue between the generations of the elderly and of the young, so that contact with “roots” may continue to render fruitful the present and the future. I urged that freedom be linked always with solidarity and acceptance, in accordance with the tradition of those lands.

Two specific meetings were dedicated to the young and the elderly: with the young in Vilnius, and with the elderly in Riga. In the square in Vilnius, full of boys and girls, the motto of the visit to Lithuania was palpable: “*Jesus Christ our hope*”. The testimonies expressed the beauty of prayer and song, where the soul opens up to God; the joy of serving others, leaving behind the enclosures of the ego in order to set out on the path, capable to rising up again after the falls. With the elderly, in Latvia, I underlined the close link between *patience* and *hope*. Those who have passed through difficult trials are the roots of a people, to be safeguarded with the grace of God, so that the new shoots may draw from them and bear fruit. The challenge for those who age is not to harden inside, but to remain open and tender of mind and heart; and this is possible with the “lymph” of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and in listening to the Word.

Also with *priests, consecrated persons and seminarians*, whom I met in Lithuania, the dimension of constancy appeared essential for hope; to be centred in God, firmly rooted in His love. What great witness in this respect has been given by many elderly priests and men and women religious! They have suffered calumny, imprisonment, deportation... but they have remained steadfast in faith. I exhorted *not to forget*, to safeguard the *memory* of the martyrs, to follow their examples.

And speaking of memory, in Vilnius I paid homage to the victims of the Jewish genocide in Lithuania, exactly 75 years after the closure of the great Ghetto, which was the antechamber of death for tens of thousands of Jews. At the same time I visited the *Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights*: I paused in prayer precisely in the rooms where those who opposed the regime were detained, tortured and killed. They killed more or less forty a night. It is affecting to see how far human cruelty can go. Let us think about this.

The years pass, regimes fall, but above the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius, Mary Mother of Mercy continues to watch over her people, as a sign of sure hope and consolation (cf. Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 68).

A living sign of the Gospel is always concrete charity. Even where secularization is at its strongest, God speaks with the language of love, care, and service to those who are in need. And so hearts open, and miracles happen:

in the desert, new life grows.

In the three Eucharistic celebrations – in Kaunas, Lithuania, in Aglona, Latvia, and in Tallinn, Estonia – the holy faithful people of God on their path in those lands renewed their “yes” to *Christ our hope*; they renewed it with Mary, who always *shows herself to be Mother* to her children, especially those who suffer the most; they renewed it as a chosen, priestly and holy people, *in whose heart God reawakens the grace of Baptism*.

Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Thank you!

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet Francophone pilgrims, especially the groups from Verdun, Bordeaux, Nice and Strasbourg. For each one of us, Christ is our hope. Following the example of our brothers in the Baltic states, let us persevere in faith and remember those who have preceded us, so that God can speak to our hearts and make new life germinate around us. God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, particularly the groups from England, Scotland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Nigeria, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, Canada and the United States of America. In a particular way my greeting goes to the new seminarians of the Venerable English College as they begin their priestly formation here in Rome, and to the seminarians of the Pontifical North American College and their families gathered for the ordination to the Diaconate to be celebrated tomorrow. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

German

A warm welcome to German-speaking pilgrims. I am pleased to greet the numerous school groups present, especially students from Cloppenburg, Hamburg, Meppen and Ostfriesland. Dear friends, always be witnesses of Christ our hope, who awakens the grace of His love in our hearts. May the Lord bless you and sustain you on your journey of faith.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus, which in times of trial gives strength and encourages hope, and in times of freedom enlightens the daily life of people, families and society. May Mary, Mother of Mercy, accompany us on the path of concrete charity and free service. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I greet Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the faithful of Niterói and Olinda and Recife. United in prayer for the next Synod of Bishops on young people, faith and vocation discernment, I hope that your pilgrimage to Rome will strengthen, in divine love, the bonds of each person with his own family, with the ecclesial community and with society. May Our Lady accompany you and protect you.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, let us choose to be holy by healing the margins and peripheries of our society, where our brother lies and suffers his exclusion. Let us fix our gaze on that brother and hold out our hand to raise him up, because in him there is the image of God; he is a brother redeemed by Jesus Christ. This is holiness lived, day by day! May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I warmly welcome the Polish faithful. In a special way, I greet the general management and the officials of the Polish Police Force, pilgrims in Rome on the occasion of the centenary of its founding. I thank all those who accompanied me with prayer during my recent trip. Keeping in my heart the experience of this visit to the countries historically and spiritually linked to Poland, I entrust you, your families and your country to the Mother of Mercy of the "Gate of Dawn". I bless you from my heart!

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Capitulars of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception; the participants in the meeting promoted by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life and the meeting organized by the Daughters of Mercy.

I greet the parish groups; the faithful of the diocese of Alessandria, with their bishop, Msgr. Guido Gallese and Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi; the Saint Clare of Assisi School in Avellino; the group from the University of Foggia; the Msgr. Cesare Mazzolari di Concesio Foundation, and pilgrims from Robbio.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. Today is the liturgical memory of the medical saints and martyrs Cosma and Damiano. Let us learn from these two brothers, the Christian witness of their faith in the tireless and gratuitous care offered to those afflicted with illness. By their intercession, may the Lord give comfort and health to all those who are suffering and sick, and inspire generosity and spirit of service to those engaged in providing healthcare.

Appeal of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

Last Saturday, 22 September, a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China was signed in Beijing, regarding the appointment of bishops in China. The Agreement is the fruit of a long and careful journey of dialogue, intended to promote a more positive collaboration between the Holy See and the Chinese authorities for the good of the Catholic community in China and for the harmony of society as a whole.

In this spirit, I have decided to address to Chinese Catholics and to all the universal Church a Message of fraternal encouragement, which will be published today. With this, I hope that in China a new phase may begin, which will help to heal the wounds of the past, to re-establish and maintain the full communion of all Chinese Catholics and to assume with renewed commitment the announcement of the Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have an important task! We are called to accompany our brothers and sisters in China with fervent prayer and fraternal friendship. They know they are not alone. All the Church prays with them and for them. Let us ask Our Lady, Mother of Hope and Help of Christians, to bless and to keep all Catholics in China, while for the entire Chinese people let us invoke from God the gift of prosperity and peace.
