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Eucharistic celebration presided at by Pope Francis on the anniversary of his visit to Lampedusa

At 11.00 this morning, at the Altar of the Cathedra in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis presided at the Eucharistic celebration on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of his visit to Lampedusa.

The following is the homily the Pope pronounced during the Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

Today the word of God speaks to us of salvation and liberation.

Salvation. During his journey from Beersheba to Haran, Jacob decides to stop and rest in a solitary place. In a dream, he sees a ladder: its base rests on the earth and its top reaches to heaven (cf. *Gen* 28:10-22). The ladder, on which angels of God are ascending and descending, represents the connection between the divine and the human, fulfilled historically in Christ's incarnation (cf. *Jn* 1:51), which was the Father's loving gift of revelation and salvation. The ladder is an allegory of the divine action that precedes all human activity. It is the antithesis of the Tower of Babel, built by men with their own strength, who wanted to reach heaven to become gods. In this case, however, it is God who comes down; it is the Lord who reveals himself; it is God who saves. And Emmanuel, God-with-us, fulfils the promise of mutual belonging between the Lord and humanity, in the sign of an incarnate and merciful love that gives life in abundance.

Faced with this revelation, Jacob makes an act of trust in the Lord, which becomes a work of recognition and adoration that marks a key moment in the history of salvation. He asks the Lord to protect him on the difficult journey he must make, and says: "The Lord shall be my God" (*Gen* 28:21).

Echoing the words of the patriarch, we repeated in the psalm: "O my God, I trust in you". He is our refuge and our strength, our shield and our armour, our anchor in times of trial. The Lord is a refuge for the faithful who call on him in times of tribulation. For it is indeed at such moments that our prayer is made purer, when we realize that the security the world offers has little worth, and only God remains. God alone opens up heaven for those

who live on earth. Only God saves.

This total and absolute trust is shared by the head of the synagogue and the sick woman in the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 9:18-26). These are scenes of *liberation*. Both draw close to Jesus in order to obtain from him what no one else can give them: liberation from sickness and from death. On the one hand, there is the daughter of one of the city authorities; on the other, a woman afflicted by a sickness that has made her an outcast, marginalized, someone impure. But Jesus makes no distinctions: liberation is generously given to each of them. Their longing places both the woman and the girl among the “least” who are to be loved and raised up.

Jesus reveals to his disciples the need for a preferential option for the least, those who must be given the front row in the exercise of charity. There are many forms of poverty today; as Saint John Paul II wrote: “The ‘poor’, in varied states of affliction, are the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as ‘the least’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 82).

On this sixth anniversary of the visit to Lampedusa, my thoughts go out to those “least ones” who daily cry out to the Lord, asking to be freed from the evils that afflict them. These least ones are abandoned and cheated into dying in the desert; these least ones are tortured, abused and violated in detention camps; these least ones face the waves of an unforgiving sea; these least ones are left in reception camps too long for them to be called temporary. These are only some of the least ones who Jesus asks us to love and raise up. Unfortunately the existential peripheries of our cities are densely populated with persons who have been thrown away, marginalized, oppressed, discriminated against, abused, exploited, abandoned, poor and suffering. In the spirit of the Beatitudes we are called to comfort them in their affliction and offer them mercy; to sate their hunger and thirst for justice; to let them experience God’s caring fatherliness; to show them the way to the Kingdom of Heaven. They are persons; these are not mere social or migrant issues! “*This is not just about migrants*”, in the twofold sense that migrants are first of all human persons, and that they are the symbol of all those rejected by today’s globalized society.

We spontaneously return to the image of Jacob’s ladder. In Christ Jesus, the connection between earth and heaven is guaranteed and is accessible to all. Yet climbing the steps of this ladder requires commitment, effort and grace. The weakest and most vulnerable must to be helped. I like to think that we could be those angels ascending and descending, taking under our wings the little ones, the lame, the sick, those excluded: the least ones, who would otherwise stay behind and would experience only grinding poverty on earth, without glimpsing in this life anything of heaven’s brightness.

This is, brothers and sisters, a tremendous responsibility, from which no one is exempt if we wish to fulfil the mission of salvation and liberation in which the Lord himself has called us to cooperate. I know that many of you, who arrived just a few months ago, are already assisting brothers and sisters who have come even more recently. I want to thank you for this most beautiful example of humanity, gratitude and solidarity.
