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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

During his address in Italian, on the eve of the Easter Triduum, the Pope focused on the theme: "The peace of Easter" (Bible reading: *Jn 14:27*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful in attendance.

The general audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We are in the middle of Holy Week, which lasts from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Both these Sundays are characterized by the feast that takes place around Jesus. But they are two different feasts.

Last Sunday, we saw Christ solemnly entering Jerusalem, as though for a feast, welcomed as the Messiah: cloaks (cf. *Lk 19:36*) and branches cut from trees (cf. *Mt 21:8*) were laid before him on the ground. The exultant crowd loudly blesses "the King who comes", and acclaims "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (*Lk 19:38*). Those people there celebrate because they see Jesus' entry as the arrival of a new king, who would bring peace and glory. That was the peace those people were waiting for: a glorious peace, the fruit of royal intervention, that of a powerful messiah who would have liberated Jerusalem from the Roman occupation. Others probably dreamed of the re-establishment of a social peace and saw Jesus as the ideal king, who would feed the crowd with bread, as he had done already, and would work great miracles, thus bringing more justice

into the world.

But Jesus never speaks of this. He has a different Passover ahead of him, not a triumphal Passover. The only thing that he is concerned about in the preparation of his entry into Jerusalem is to ride “a colt tied, on which no-one has ever yet sat” (v. 30). This is how Christ brings peace into the world: through meekness and mildness, symbolized by that tethered colt, on which no-one had ever sat. No-one, because God’s way of doing things is different to that of the world. Indeed, just before Passover, Jesus explains to the disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (*Jn 14:27*). They are two different approaches: the way the world gives us peace, and the way God gives us peace. They are different.

The peace Jesus gives to us at Easter is not the peace that follows the strategies of the world, which believes it can obtain it through force, by conquest and with various forms of imposition. This peace, in reality, is only an interval between wars: we are well aware of this. The peace of the Lord follows the way of meekness and the cross: it is taking responsibility for others. Indeed, Christ took on himself our evil, sin and death. He took all of this upon himself. In this way he freed us. He paid for us. His peace is not the fruit of some compromise, but rather is born of self-giving. This meek and courageous peace, though, is difficult to accept. In fact, the crowd who exalted Jesus is the same that a few days later will shout, “Crucify him!” and, fearful and disappointed, will not lift a finger for him.

In this regard, a great story by Dostoevsky, the so-called Legend of *The Grand Inquisitor*, is always relevant. It tells of Jesus who, after several centuries, returns to Earth. He is immediately welcomed by the rejoicing crowd, which recognizes and acclaims him. “Ah, you have returned! Come, come with us!”. But then he is arrested by the Inquisitor, who represents worldly logic. The latter interrogates him and criticizes him fiercely. The final reason for the rebuke is that Christ, although he could, never wanted to become Caesar, the greatest king of this world, preferring to leave humanity free rather than subjugate it and solve its problems by force. He could have established peace in the world, bending the free but precarious heart of man by force of a higher power, but he chose not to: he respected our freedom. “Hadst Thou taken the world and Caesar’s purple, Thou wouldst have founded the universal state and given universal peace” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Milan 2012, 345); and with a lashing sentence he concludes, “For it anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou” (348). Here is the deception that is repeated throughout history, the temptation of a false peace, based on power, which then leads to hatred and betrayal of God, and much bitterness in the soul.

In the end, according to the story, the Inquisitor “longed for [Jesus] to say something, however bitter and terrible”. But Jesus reacts with a gentle and concrete gestures: “He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips” (352). Jesus’ peace does not overpower others; it is not an armed peace, never! The weapons of the Gospel are prayer, tenderness, forgiveness and freely-given love for one’s neighbour, love for every neighbour. This is how God’s peace is brought into the world. This is why the armed aggression of these days, like every war, represents an outrage against God, a blasphemous betrayal of the Lord of Passover, a preference for the face of the false god of this world over his meek one. War is always a human act, to bring about the idolatry of power.

Before his final Passover, Jesus says to his disciples: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (*Jn 14:27*). Yes, because while worldly power leaves only destruction and death in its wake – we have seen this in recent days – his peace builds up history, starting from the heart of every person who welcomes us. Easter is therefore the true feast of God and humanity, because the peace that Christ gained on the cross in giving himself is distributed to us. Therefore, the Risen Christ, on Easter Day, appears to the disciples, and how does he greet them? “Peace be with you!” (*Jn 20:19-21*). This is the greeting of Christ victorious, the Risen Christ.

Brothers, sisters, Easter means “passage”. This year above all, it is a blessed occasion to pass from the worldly god to the Christian God, from the greed that we carry within us to the charity that sets us free, from the expectation of a peace brought by force to the commitment to bear real witness to the peace of Jesus. Brothers and sisters, let us place ourselves before the Crucified One, the wellspring of our peace, and ask him for peace of heart and peace in the world.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from the United States of America. May the celebration of Easter be a time of grace and renewal for everyone. Upon each of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.
