
The Pope at the General Audience: “Close to those who are ill, heartfelt thanks to hospital staff, doctors, nurses, and volunteers”

At the end of the first general audience in seven years of pontificate livestreamed from the Apostolic Library – and not in St. Peter’s Square on in the Paul VI Hall, to avoid mass gatherings and avert the risks of the spread of Covid-19, in compliance with the measures adopted by the Italian government - the Pope addressed all those affected by the current health emergency. “I would like to speak directly to all those ill with the coronavirus, those who are suffering from this sickness, and to the many people suffering uncertainty related to their own illnesses”, Francis said in unwritten remarks addressing Italian-speaking faithful, as is customary at the end of the Wednesday General Audience. “My heartfelt thanks go to the auxiliary staff, doctors, nurses, volunteers who assist those who are suffering at this difficult time. I thank all Christians, and men and women of goodwill, who are praying together in unity, regardless of their religious tradition. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your efforts.” The Pope made yet another - impromptu - appeal, for Syria: “I hope that this pain, this serious epidemic, will not make us forget the suffering of the Syrians, at the borders of Greece and Turkey, who have suffered for years. They are fleeing war, hunger and disease. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters, the many children who are suffering there.” Addressing Italian faithful, the Pope said: “I encourage you to face every situation, even the most difficult, with fortitude, responsibility, and hope.” Finally, the Pope expressed his gratitude to the community of the Due Palazzi prison in Padua, which this year was commissioned to write the meditations for Good Friday's Way of the Cross, praised by Francis for the “deepness” of the writings, which he had the chance to read yesterday for the first time. *“Hunger and thirst are basic needs, they involve survival”*, Francis emphasized with regard to the fourth Beatitude contained in the Gospel of Matthew - “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” – at the centre of the catechesis of today’s general audience. “The Lord speaks of a hungering and thirst for justice that goes deeper than the legitimate need for human justice that every man carries in his heart,” the Pope said, stating that **“in every heart**, even in the most corrupt person that is distant from righteousness, lies a yearning for the light. Even if it lies under heaps of deceit and mistakes, there is always a longing for truth and goodness, that is a thirst for God. **There is an inner thirst, an inner hunger, an inner restlessness.**”

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest expression of righteousness offered to the heart of humanity, which it has a vital need of, even though it is unaware of it”,

Francis said, with examples from daily life: “When a man and a woman get married they plan to do something great and beautiful. If they preserve this thirst, they will always find the way forward, amidst difficulties, with the help of Grace. Even young people have this thirst, and they must not lose it! It is necessary to protect and nourish the desire for love, for tenderness, for acceptance in the hearts of children, expressed in their sincere and luminous zeal.”

“Every person is called to rediscover what really matters, the true needs, what makes life a good life and, at the same time, that which is of secondary importance, and what they can do without”,

is the Pope’s invitation that feels made to measure, in times of Coronavirus. “Jesus announces this beatitude: those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. If this desire is not disappointed, if it is satisfied, it will always be propitious, for it corresponds to the heart of God, to His Holy Spirit, that is love.” “And to the seed that the Holy Spirit has sown in our hearts”, the Pope concluded in unprepared remarks: “May the Lord give us this grace, this thirst for righteousness, the

desire to see God and to do good unto others.”

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