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## **Pope at audience: “The martyrs of today are more numerous than the martyrs of the first centuries”**

Christian witness "annoys those with a worldly mindset." But Christians are those who follow the path of the Beatitudes, not the path of "compromise", at the cost of martyrdom. In the general audience livestreamed from the Library of the Apostolic Palace, the Pope concluded his catechesis on the Beatitudes, focusing on the final Beatitude: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". "Let us not be discouraged when life consistent with the Gospel attracts persecution from the people", Francis said. In the closing greetings the Pope entrusted his prayers to Saint Catherine, co-patron of Italy and Patron Saint of Europe: **"I ask St Catherine to protect Italy during this pandemic, and to protect the whole of Europe, that it may remain united."** *"When holiness appears and the life of the children of God emerges,"* Francis explained, *"in that beauty there is an uncomfortable element that is inviting us to take a stand: to either let ourselves be called into question and embrace what is good, or to reject that light and harden our hearts, even to the point of opposition and persecution."* **"The world, with its idols, its compromises and its priorities, cannot approve this way of living."** For the world, with its "structures of sin", life according to the Gospel is "an error and a problem, thus something to be marginalized" - Francis said - while Christians are viewed as "idealists or fanatics." "If the world lives only for money, then whoever shows that life can be fulfilled through self-giving and renunciation becomes a nuisance to this system of greed. This word - nuisance - is the key word". "The happiness promised in this final Beatitude is the same as that of the first: the kingdom of heaven is for the persecuted just as it is for the poor in spirit:" "Poverty in spirit, sorrow, meekness, thirst for holiness, mercy, purification of the heart and deeds of peace can lead to persecution because of Christ, but this persecution is ultimately the cause of joy and great reward in heaven." The path of the Beatitudes "is a Paschal journey from a life according to the world to a life according to God, from an existence guided by the flesh - that is, by selfishness - to one guided by the Holy Spirit."

**"The martyrs of today are many, more numerous than the martyrs of the first centuries",**

the Pope said paying tribute to those who have sacrificed their life for the faith. "It's perplexing, it draws our attention to see that in the persecution of martyrs, hostility grows to the point of persecution." The Pope denounced: "Let it suffice to mention the persecutions of the last century, by European dictatorships, marked by the persecution of Christians, against Christian witness and against Christian heroism." "It is painful to remember that, at this moment in time, many Christians are suffering persecution in various parts of the world, and we must hope and pray that their affliction will cease as soon as possible," is the Pope's appeal. At the same time, "the tragedy of persecution is also the place of liberation from the domination of success, vainglory and the compromises of the world." *"When Christians are despised not always it is equivalent to persecution: there is also a form of contempt that we are responsible for when we lose the taste for Christ and his Gospel,"* Francis said. "Compromises with the world are the danger", because "Christians are always tempted to reach compromises with the spirit of the world." "Reject compromises and follow the path of Jesus Christ", the Pope's exhortation: "This is the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, the greatest joy, the true bliss." The "path" referred to is that of Saint Paul: "When he thought himself righteous he was in fact a persecutor, but when he realized he was a persecutor, he became a man of love, who faced gladly the persecution he suffered."