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GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 30 November 2016

[Multimedia]

38. Pray God for the living and the dead

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

With today's catechesis we shall conclude the cycle dedicated to mercy. Although the catecheses are finished, mercy must continue! Let us thank the Lord for all of this and let us keep it in our heart for consolation and comfort.

The final spiritual work of mercy requires us to *pray for the living and the dead*. We can also place this alongside the last corporal work of mercy, which calls us to *bury the dead*. The latter may seem a curious request; and although, in certain regions of the world which are living under the scourge of war, with bombings day and night which sow fear and claim innocent victims, sadly this work is timely. The Bible gives a fine example in this regard: that of the elderly Tobit, who, risking his life, would bury the dead in spite of the king's prohibition (cf. Tob 1:17-19, 2:2-4). Today too, there are those who risk their lives to bury unfortunate victims of war. Thus, this corporal work of mercy is not far from our daily existence. It makes us ponder what happened on Good Friday, when the Virgin Mary, along with John and several women were near Jesus' Cross. After his death, Joseph of Arimathea — a rich member of the Sanhedrin, who had become a follower of Jesus — came and offered his tomb, newly hewn out of the rock, for Him. He personally went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body: a true work of mercy performed with great courage (cf. Mt 27:57-60)! For Christians, burial is an act of compassion, but also an act of great faith. We bury the bodies of our loved ones, in the hope of their resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-34). This is a rite that firmly endures and is heartfelt in our people, and which has a special resonance in this month of November which is dedicated in particular to prayer for the departed.

Praying for the dead is, first and foremost, a sign of appreciation for the witness they have left us and the good that they have done. It is giving thanks to the Lord for having given them to us and for their love and their friendship. The Church prays for the deceased in a particular way during Holy Mass. The priest states: "Be mindful, O Lord, of thy servants who are gone before us with the sign of faith, and rest in sleep of peace. To these, O Lord, and to all that sleep in Christ, grant we beseech thee a place of refreshment, light and peace" (Roman Canon). It is a simple, effective, meaningful remembrance, because it entrusts our loved ones to God's mercy. We pray with Christian hope that they may be with him in Paradise, as we wait to be together again in that mystery of love which we do not comprehend, but which we know to be true because it is a promise that Jesus made. We will all rise again and we will all be forever with Jesus, with Him.

Remembering the faithful departed must not cause us to forget to also *pray for the living*, who together with us face the trials of life each day. The need for this prayer is even more evident if we place it in the light of the profession of faith which states: "I believe in the Communion of Saints". It is the mystery which expresses the beauty of the mercy that Jesus revealed to us. The Communion of Saints, indeed, indicates that we are all immersed in God's life and live in his love. All of us, living and dead, are in communion, that is, as a union; united in the community of those who have received Baptism, and of those who are nourished by the Body of Christ and form part of the great family of God. We are all the same family, united. For this reason we pray for each other.

How many different ways there are to pray for our neighbour! They are all valid and accepted by God if done from the heart. I am thinking in a particular way of the mothers and fathers who bless their children in the morning and in the evening. There is still this practice in some families: blessing a child is a prayer. I think of praying for sick people, when we go to visit them and pray for them; of silent intercession, at times tearful, in the many difficult situations which require prayer.

Yesterday a good man, an entrepreneur, came to Mass at Santa Marta. That young man must close his factory because he cannot manage, and he wept, saying: "I don't want to leave more than 50 families without work. I could declare the company bankrupt: I could go home with my money, but my heart would weep for for these 50 families the rest of my life". This is a good Christian who prays through his works: he came to Mass to pray that the Lord give him a way out, not only for him but for the 50 families. This is a man who knows how to pray, with his heart and through his deeds, he knows how to pray for his neighbour. He is in a difficult situation, and he is not seeking the easiest way out: "let them manage on their own". This man is a Christian. It did me good to listen to him! Perhaps there are many like him today, at this time in which so many people are in difficulty because of a lack of work. However, I also think of giving thanks for the good news about a friend, a relative, a co-worker: "Thank you Lord, for this wonderful thing!". This too is praying for others! Thanking the Lord when things go well. At times, as Saint Paul says, "we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). It is the Spirit who prays in us. Therefore, let us open our heart, to enable the Holy Spirit, scrutinizing our deepest aspirations, to purify them and lead them to fulfillment. However, for us and for others, let us always ask that God's will be done, as in the *Our Father*, because his will is surely the greatest good, the goodness of a Father who never abandons us: pray and let the Holy Spirit pray in us. This is beautiful in life: to pray, thanking and praising the Lord, asking for something, weeping when there are difficulties, like that man. But let the heart always be open to the Spirit, that he may pray in us, with us and for us.

Concluding these catecheses on mercy, let us commit ourselves to pray for each other so that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy may become ever more the style of our life. The catecheses, as I said at the beginning, end here. We have covered the 14 works of mercy, but mercy continues and we must exercise it in these 14 ways. Thank you.

Special greetings:

I address a cordial greeting to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular to those from Syria and from the Middle East. Let us pray together for the living, for the deceased and for those who live dying of fear caused by war, terror, violence and the loss of their homeland and loved ones. Let us also pray for the many brave people who risk their lives to provide a dignified burial to the dead and to care for the wounded. May the Lord bless you all and protect you from the evil one!

Tomorrow, December first, is World AIDS Day, sponsored by the United Nations. Millions of people live with this disease and only half of them have access to lifesaving treatments. I ask you to pray for them and for their loved ones and to promote solidarity so that the poorest may also benefit from appropriate diagnosis and care. I lastly appeal that all may adopt responsible behaviour to prevent the further spread of this disease.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from England, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

I offer a warm greeting to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today is the Feast of the Apostle Andrew, brother of Saint Peter. May his haste to encounter the Lord in the sepulchre remind you, dear *young people*, that our life is a pilgrimage to the House of the Father; may his strength in facing martyrdom sustain you, dear *sick people*, when suffering seems unbearable; and may his passionate following of the Saviour inspire you, dear *newlyweds*, to understand the importance of love in your new family. And on the Solemnity of the Apostle Andrew, I would also like to greet the Church of Constantinople and the beloved Patriarch Bartholomew and join with him and with the Church of Constantinople, in this celebration — with this Sister Church in the name of Peter and Andrew, all together — and to wish them all possible good, all the Lord's blessings and a great embrace.

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The HOLY SEE

