
Pope at audience: "A nuclear war would be the ultimate catastrophe"

The Pope recited two heartfelt prayers for peace in Ukraine, first during a meeting with two thousand school children from the "La Zolla" Institute in Milan, in St Peter's Basilica, and after that at the conclusion of the catechesis during the General Audience in Paul VI Hall - with Ukraine's yellow and blue flags unfurled - dedicated to the value and meaning of old age as a prophetic reminder against the corruption of a carefree life. *"Lord Jesus, I pray to You to protect the children, the boys and girls living under the bombs, witnessing this horrendous war, with no food, forced to escape, abandoning their homes and leaving everything behind", the prayer in St. Peter's Basilica: "Lord Jesus, look at these children, these boys and girls, bless them and protect them, they are the victims of the arrogance of adults."* In Paul VI Hall, Francis read the prayer written by Msgr. **Mimmo Battaglia**, Archbishop of Naples, entrusting it with this gesture to believers throughout the world. It reads: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners! Lord Jesus, born under the bombs falling on Kiev, have mercy on us! Lord Jesus, who died in the arms of his mother in a bunker in Kharkiv, have mercy on us! Lord Jesus, a twenty-year-old sent to the battlefield, have mercy on us! Lord Jesus, as You continue to behold armed hands in the shadows of Your cross, have mercy on us! Forgive us, O Lord, if, not content with the nails with which we pierced your hand, we continue to quench our thirst with the blood of those slaughtered by weapons. Forgive us, dear Lord, if these hands that You created to protect have been transformed into instruments of death. Forgive us, if we continue to murder our brother, if, like Cain, we continue picking up stones from our land to kill Abel. Forgive us, if we continue to justify cruelty with our toil, if we legitimate the cruelty of our actions with our pain. Forgive us the war, O Lord. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we implore you! Stop the hand of Cain! Enlighten our conscience, may our will not be done, do not abandon us to our own actions! Stop us, O Lord, stop us! When You will have stopped the hand of Cain, take care of him also. He is our brother. O Lord, stop the violence! Stop us!" "We pray above all for peace in Ukraine", the Holy Father said shortly before addressing the Polish faithful, greeted with a warm round of applause by those present in Paul VI Hall. Finally, addressing the Italian-speaking faithful, Francis appealed: "In this time of Lent, in this painful time of war, I invite you to turn your gaze to Christ."

"It seems that the symbol of the flood is gaining ground in our subconscious",

Francis said in the opening lines of the catechesis: "the current pandemic puts a heavy weight on our carefree representation of the things that matter, for life and its destiny." Indeed, "we are under pressure, exposed to opposing stresses that confuse us", the Pope's reflection: "On the one hand, we have the optimism of an eternal youth, kindled by the extraordinary progress of technology, that depicts a future full of machines that are more efficient and more intelligent than us, that will cure our ills and devise for us the best solutions so as not to die: the world of robots. On the other hand,

our imagination appears increasingly concentrated on the representation of a final catastrophe that will extinguish us." "This is what happens with an eventual nuclear war",

Francis added in unscripted remarks: "The 'day after' this – if there will still be days and human beings – will have to start again from scratch. Destroying everything to start again from scratch." "Human beings, when they limit themselves to enjoying life, lose even the perception of corruption, which mortifies their dignity and poisons meaning", the Pope said introducing the extensive part of the catechesis dedicated to corruption, enriched with numerous off-text remarks.

"When the perception of corruption is lost, corruption becomes something normal",

Francis explained: “As long as normal life can be filled with “wellbeing”, we do not want to think about what makes it empty of justice and love”, he commented: *“But I am fine! Why should I think about problems, about wars, about human suffering, all that poverty, all that evil? No, I am fine. I don’t care about others”*. This is the subconscious thought that leads us towards living in a state of corruption. Can corruption become normal, I wonder? Brothers and sisters, unfortunately, yes. We can breathe the air of corruption just as we breath oxygen.” To counteract corruption, there is a great need today for “the wisdom of the elderly”, the Pope said: “The new generations expect of us, the elderly, a word that is prophecy, that opens the doors to new perspectives outside that carefree world of corruption.” Indeed, it is this “carefreeness” that “weakens our defenses, it dulls our consciences and it turns us – even involuntarily – into accomplices. Because corruption is not solitary: a person always has accomplices. And corruption always spreads, it spreads.” “Old age is in a good position to grasp the deception of this normalization of a life obsessed with enjoyment and empty of interiority”, Francis argued: “life without thought, without sacrifice, without beauty, without truth, without justice, without love: this is all corruption.”

“We, the elderly, should be prophets against corruption, just as Noah.”

In his concluding remarks, Francis called on the faithful: “It is a bad thing, when seniors become old people with the same corrupt habits of the young.” Hence, we say No to “corrupt old age” , while welcoming “generative old age.” “Let us move forward. The world needs strong young people, who move forward, and wise elders. Let us ask the Lord for the grace of wisdom.”

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