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## Pope at audience: “Tears are not universal. They are always my tears”

“Tears are not universal. Everyone has their own”, this we learn in the *Book of Psalms*, with a question that runs throughout the entire book: “Until when?”, the Pope said – unable to greet the faithful upon entering and exiting the Paul VI Audience Hall owing to the new preventive measures against the coronavirus. At the end of the audience, his heartfelt blessing and greeting to all from the stage, alone, was reciprocated by a warm applause from those present who acclaimed him: “Long live the Pope! “You are distant and cautious as you must be - the Holy Father told them moments earlier - but as it happens, when I come down everyone comes near and gathers together, so there is a risk of contagion.” “Do forgive me if today I greet you from afar - Francis concluded calling on everyone to wear their masks and to keep social distancing - but if all of us, as good citizens, comply with authorities' requirements, it will help overcome the pandemic.” **“To pray well we must pray as we are. One must not embellish the soul to pray”**, Francis said. “Go in front of the Lord as we are, with the good things and also with the bad things that no-one knows about, but that we inwardly know”, is the invitation regarding the Psalms, wherein “we find all human sentiments: the joys, the sorrows, the doubts, the hopes, the bitterness that colour our lives.” “As we read and reread the Psalms, we learn the language of prayer”, assures the Pope: “in this book we do not encounter ethereal people, abstract people, those who confuse prayer with an aesthetic or alienating experience.” In fact, “the Psalms are not texts created on paper; they are invocations, often dramatic, that spring from lived existence. To pray them it is enough for us to be what we are.” In the Psalms “we hear the voices of men and women of prayer in flesh and blood, whose life, like that of us all, is fraught with problems, hardships and uncertainties.”

### “Until when?”

This question runs throughout the entire *Book* and throughout our lives. “Every suffering calls for liberation, every tear calls for consolation, every wound awaits healing, every slander a sentence of absolution. ‘Until when, Lord, must I suffer this? Listen to me, Lord!’ How many times we have prayed like this, with ‘Until when?’, enough now, Lord!” “By constantly asking such questions, the Psalms teach us not to get used to pain, and remind us that life is not saved unless it is healed”, Francis explains: *“The existence of each human being is but a breath, his or her story is fleeting, but the prayerful know that they are precious in the eyes of God, and so it makes sense to cry out.”* The prayer of the Psalms “is the testimony of this cry: a multiple cry, because in life pain takes a thousand forms, and takes the name of sickness, hatred, war, persecution, distrust... Until the supreme ‘scandal’, that of death.” **“Everyone suffers in this world: whether they believe in God or reject Him.”** But in the Psalter, pain becomes a relationship, rapport: “a cry for help waiting to intercept a listening ear. It cannot remain meaningless, without purpose.” *“Even the pains we suffer cannot be merely specific cases of a universal law”, the Pope points out: “they are always ‘my’ tears. Tears are not universal, they are “my” tears. Everyone has their own. My tears and my pain drive me to go ahead in prayer. They are my tears, that no one has ever shed before me. Yes, they have wept, many. But my tears are mine, My pain is my own, my suffering is my own.”* “Before entering the Hall – the Pope said in unprepared remarks - I met the parents of that priest of the diocese of Como who was killed: he was killed precisely in his service to others. The tears of those parents are their own tears, and each one of them knows how much he or she has suffered in seeing this son who gave his life in service to the poor.” “When we want to console somebody, we cannot find the words. Why? Because we cannot arrive at his or her pain, because her sorrows are her own, his tears are his own.” Francis’ chosen example: “the same is true of us: the tears, the sorrow, the tears are mine, and with these tears, with this sorrow I turn to the Lord.” **“All human pains for God are sacred”**, for “before God we are not strangers, or numbers. We are faces and hearts, known one by one, by name.” In the Psalms, the believer “knows that even if all human doors were barred,

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God's door is open", Francis said. "Even if the whole world had issued a verdict of condemnation, there is salvation in God." "The Lord listens": sometimes in prayer it is enough to know this", says the Pope: *"Problems are not always solved. Those who pray are not deluded: they know that many questions of life down here remain unresolved, with no way out; suffering will accompany us and, after one battle, others will await us. But if we are listened to, everything becomes more bearable."* For Francis, **"the worst thing that can happen is to suffer in abandonment, without being remembered"**: "From this prayer saves us. Because it can happen, and even often, that we do not understand God's plans. But our cries do not stagnate down here: they rise up to Him, He who has the heart of a Father, and who cries Himself for every son and daughter who suffers and dies." *"It is good for me, in difficult moments, to think of Jesus weeping," the Pope added in impromptu remarks: "when He wept looking at Jerusalem, when He wept before Lazarus' tomb. God has wept for me, God weeps, He weeps for our sorrows."* **"To think that Jesus weeps with me in sorrow is a consolation: it helps us keep going"**, Francis concluded: "If we maintain our relationship with Him, life does not spare us suffering, but we open up to a great horizon of goodness and set out towards its fulfilment. Take courage, persevere in prayer. Jesus is always by our side!"

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