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Pope: Eucharist gives strength to those who are weak

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The Eucharist sustains those who are tired, worn out or lost in the world and transforms human sin and weakness into new life, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Speaking at his weekly general audience Jan. 11, the pope focused on Jesus and the Last Supper, where he instituted the Eucharist, "the sacrament of his body and blood."

"Jesus' gift of himself anticipates his sacrifice on the cross and his glorious resurrection," the pope said.

He offers his life before it is taken from him on the cross and as such "transforms his violent death into a free act of giving himself for others. Violence immediately is transformed into an active, free and redemptive sacrifice," the pope said.

The pope said that, at the Last Supper, Jesus prayed for his disciples, especially Peter, warning him, according to the Gospel of Luke, that "Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat." But Jesus prayed that his disciple's faith would not fail and that Peter, who would betray Jesus, would return to strengthen the others' faith, the pope said.

"The Eucharist is food for pilgrims, which becomes (a source of) strength also for those who are tired, worn out and lost," he said.

Jesus' words at the Last Supper were meant to help Peter, and others who stray, find the strength to be able to follow Christ once again, he said.

Taking part in the Eucharist today is "indispensable for Christian life" and is still a source of strength so that "our life is not lost, despite our weakness and our infidelity, but is transformed."

The pope asked that people join their prayers with the Lord's and offer their lives, "transform our crosses into free and responsible sacrifice, of love for God and our brothers and sisters."

At the end of the audience, a rare young Cuban crocodile was shown off to the pope in honor of his upcoming trip to Cuba.

The 15-inch long reptile is set to be introduced to its natural habitat in Cuba during the pope's trip in March.

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About 80 percent of the critically endangered species has been decimated and can be found only in a small area in Cuba, according to Bioparco, the Roman zoo that takes in and rehabilitates wild animals that have been illegally smuggled into Italy.

Representing the zoo was Paolo Giuntarelli, the president of the zoo's foundation, together with two small children who gave the pope a tiny sculpture of a turtle hatching from its egg to symbolize the many successful births at the zoo. The zoo, one of the oldest in the world, was also celebrating the end of its 100th anniversary.

Also, brightly dressed clowns, jugglers and acrobats from four different circuses juggled, flipped, balanced and danced for the pope and the estimated 4,000 people in the Vatican audience hall.

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