



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 171217b

Sunday 17.12.2017

The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

Before the Angelus

After the Angelus

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with the faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

On this third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), the children of the Roman Oratory Centres, parishes and families of Rome were present for the blessing of their figurines of the Child Jesus.

The following is the Pope's introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

On recent Sundays the liturgy has underlined what it means to adopt an attitude of *vigilance*, and what this means in practice for *preparing the way* for the Lord. In this third Sunday of Advent, known as "Gaudete Sunday", the "Sunday of joy", the liturgy invites us to grasp the *spirit* with which all this happens, that is, joy. Saint Paul invites us to prepare for the coming of the Lord by adopting three attitudes. Listen carefully: three attitudes. First, constant joy; second, persistent prayer; and third, the continuous giving of thanks. Constant joy, persistent prayer, and the continuous giving of thanks.

The first attitude, *constant joy*: "Rejoice always" (1 *Thessalonians* 5: 16), says the Apostle. It means to remain always in joy, even when things do not go as we would wish; however, there is that profound joy, which is peace: which is also joy, within. And peace is joy: "at ground level", but it is a joy. Anxieties, difficulties and sufferings

run through the life of every person, we all know them; and very often the reality that surrounds us seems to be inhospitable and arid, like the desert in which John the Baptist's voice resounds, as today's Gospel recalls (cf. *Jn* 1: 23). However, indeed, the Baptist's words reveal that our joy rests on the certainty that this desert is inhabited: "among you stands one whom you do not know" (v. 26). It is Jesus, the One sent by the Father Who is coming, as Isaiah emphasizes, "to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (61: 1-2). These words, which Jesus will make His own in the synagogue of Nazareth (cf. *Lk* 4: 16-19), clarify that His mission in the world consists of the liberation from sin and from the personal and social slaveries it causes. He came to earth to give back to men the dignity and freedom of children of God, which only He can communicate, and thus to give joy.

The joy that characterizes the expectation of the Messiah is based on *persevering prayer*: this is the second attitude. Saint Paul says: "pray constantly" (1 *Thessalonians* 5: 17). Through prayer, we can enter into a stable relationship with God, Who is the source of true joy. A Christian's joy is not purchased, it cannot be bought; it comes from faith and from the encounter with Jesus Christ, the reason for our happiness. The more rooted we are in Christ, the closer we are to Jesus, the more we rediscover inner serenity, even in the midst of daily contradictions. Therefore, having encountered Jesus, a Christian cannot be a prophet of misfortune, but rather a witness to and a herald of joy – a joy to be shared with others, a contagious joy that makes the path of life less weary.

The third attitude pointed out by Paul is *continuous thanksgiving*, namely, grateful love in our relationship with God. In fact, He is very generous with us, and we are invited to be grateful always for His benefits, His merciful love, His patience and kindness, thus living in incessant gratitude.

Joy, prayer and gratitude are three attitudes that prepare us to live Christmas genuinely – joy, prayer and gratitude. Let us all say it together: joy, prayer and gratitude [the people in the Square repeat] Once again! [Repeat]. In this last stretch of the Season of Advent, we entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary. She is the "cause of our joy," not only because she generated Jesus, but because she restores us continually to Him.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

[Young people of Rome sing "Happy birthday"]. Thank you very much, Thank you very much!

I join in the heartfelt appeal of the bishops of Nigeria for the release of the six Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, kidnapped around one month ago from their convent in Iguoriakhi. I pray insistently for them and for all other persons who find themselves in this painful condition: on the occasion of Christmas, may they be able to return finally to their homes: Hail, Mary...

I greet all of you, families, parish groups and associations, from Rome, from Italy, and from many parts of the world. In particular, I greet the "Lobitos" group from Portugal, and the Bolivian pilgrims. I greet the faithful of Salamanca and of Pernumia, Padua.

And now, I affectionately greet the children who have come for the blessing of the figurines of the Child Jesus, organized by the Roman Oratory Centre. What I can read from here is beautiful: the Oratory is indeed for every one of us. "There is always a place for you", the sign says. There is always a place for you! When you pray at home, before the crib with members of your family, let yourselves be drawn in by the tenderness of Baby Jesus, born poor and frail in our midst, to give us His love. This is the true Christmas. If we take Jesus away, what remains of Christmas? An empty celebration. Do not take Jesus away from Christmas! Jesus is the centre of

Christmas; Jesus is the true Christmas! Do you understand?

Therefore, I wish you all a good Sunday and a good journey towards the Nativity of Jesus. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and goodbye.
