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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.

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

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The liturgy of this fourth Sunday of Advent places in the foreground the figure of Mary, the Virgin Mother, waiting to give birth to Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Let us fix our gaze on her, model of *faith* and *charity*; and let us ask ourselves: what were her thoughts during the months of waiting? The answer comes indeed from today's Gospel passage, the account of Mary's visit to her elderly relative Elizabeth (cf. *Lk* 1: 39-45). The angel Gabriel had revealed to her that Elizabeth was expecting a son, and was already at the sixth month (cf. *Lk*, 1. 26-36). And so the Virgin, who had just conceived Jesus by the work of God, left in a hurry for Nazareth, in Galilee, to reach the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin.

The Gospel says: "She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth" (v. 4). Certainly she would have congratulated her on her motherhood, just as in turn Elizabeth greeted Mary saying, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (v. 42-43). There is a clear contrast between Mary, who had faith, and Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, who doubted, and had not believed in the angel's promise, and for this reason remains mute until the

birth of John. It is a contrast.

This episode helps us to read with an entirely particular light the mystery of man's encounter with God. An encounter that does not fall in the category of amazing prodigies, but rather in that of faith and charity. Indeed, Mary is blessed because she believed: the encounter with God is the fruit of faith. Zechariah, on the other hand, who doubted and did not believe, remained deaf and dumb. To grow in faith during the long silence: without faith we inevitably remain deaf to the consoling voice of God; and we remain unable to pronounce words of consolation and hope for our brothers. And we see this every day: people who have no faith or who have very little faith, when they have to approach a person who suffers, say circumstantial words to them, but cannot reach the heart because they do not have the strength. They do not have the strength because they have no faith, and if they have no faith, words able to reach the heart of others do not come. Faith, in turn, is nurtured by charity. The Evangelist tells us that "Mary arose and went with haste" (v. 39) to Elizabeth: with haste, not with anxiety, not anxiously, but in a hurry, in peace. "She arose": a gesture of concern. She could have stayed home to prepare for the birth of her son, but instead she cares for others before herself, demonstrating in fact that she is already a disciple of that Lord she carries in her womb. The event of the birth of Jesus began in this way, with a simple gesture of charity; besides, authentic charity is always the fruit of God's love.

The Gospel account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, which we heard today in the Mass, prepares us to live Christmas well, communicating to us the dynamism of faith and charity. This dynamism is the work of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of Love who fecundated Mary's virginal womb and who urged her to go to the service of her elderly relative. A dynamism full of joy, as we see in the meeting between the two mothers, which is all a hymn of joyous exultation in the Lord, Who does great things with the little ones who trust in Him.

May the Virgin Mary obtain for us the grace of living an *extroverted* Christmas, not dispersed but turned outwards. May our "I" not be at the centre, but rather the "You" of Jesus and the "you" of our brothers, especially those who are in need of a hand. Then we will leave space for the Love that, today too, wishes to become flesh and to come to dwell in our midst.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

My thoughts go, in this moment, to the populations of Indonesia, afflicted by violent natural disasters, which have caused grave losses of human life, missing and homeless persons, and enormous material damages. I invite you all to join with me in prayer for the victims and their loved ones. I am spiritually close to the displaced and all people in difficulty, imploring of God relief in their suffering. I make an appeal that these brothers and sisters of ours not lack our solidarity and the support of the international community.

Let us pray together...

[Hail Mary ...]

I greet you all, faithful of Rome and pilgrims from Italy and various countries. The day after tomorrow will be Christmas, and my thought goes in particular to families, who come together in these days: those who live far from their parents leave and return home; brothers and sisters try to meet again. At Christmas it is beautiful and important to stay together in the family.

But many people do not have this possibility, for various reasons, and today I would like to address in a special way all those who are far from their family and their homeland. Dear brothers and sisters, our heavenly Father does not forget you and does not abandon you. If you are Christians, I hope you will find in the Church a true family, where you can experience the warmth of fraternal love. And to all of you, those who are far from their

family, Christians and non-Christians, I say: the doors of the Christian community are open, Jesus is born for all of us and gives God's love to all. I wish you a good Sunday. Do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and goodbye.
