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## The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

### Before the Angelus

### After the Angelus

At midday today, fifth Sunday of Lent, 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!

On this fifth Sunday of Lent, the liturgy presents to us the episode of the adulterous woman (cf. *Jn* 8: 1-11). In this there are two opposite attitudes: that of the Scribes and Pharisees on one hand, and that of Jesus on the other; the former want to *condemn* the woman because they consider themselves guardians of the Law and its faithful application. Instead, Jesus wishes to *save* her, because He personifies the mercy of God who by forgiving redeems, and by reconciling renews.

So, let us look at the event. While Jesus is teaching in the temple, the Scribes and Pharisees bring Him a woman caught in adultery; they put her in the middle and ask Jesus if she should be stoned, exactly as prescribed by the Law of Moses. The Evangelist specifies that "they were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him" (v. 6). We can suppose that their purpose was this — see the wickedness of these people: the "no" to stoning would be a reason to accuse Jesus of disobedience to the Law. "Yes", on the other hand, would serve to denounce him to the Roman authority, which had reserved to itself the power to issue sentences and did not permit lynching by the people. And Jesus had to answer.

Jesus' interlocutors are caught up in narrow legalism and want to close the Son of God in their perspective of judgment and condemnation. However, He did not come into the world to judge and condemn, but rather to save and offer people a new life. And how does Jesus react in face of this test? First of all, He remains silent for a while, and He stoops and writes with His finger on the ground as if to recall that God is the only Lawmaker and Judge, who wrote the Law on stone. And then He says: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). So Jesus appeals to the conscience of those men: they considered themselves "champions of justice," but He recalls them to the awareness of their condition of sinful men so that they cannot arrogate to themselves the right of life or death over one of their fellow beings. At that point, one after the other, beginning with the eldest — that is, those more expert in their miseries — they went away, giving up stoning the woman. This scene also invites us all to become conscious that we are sinners and to drop from our hands the stone of denigration and condemnation, of gossip, which we sometimes want to fling against others. When we speak badly of others, we throw stones; we are like these men.

In the end, there remain only Jesus and the woman, there in the middle, "the wretched woman and mercy", says Saint Augustine (*Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 33.5). Jesus is the only one without guilt, the only one who could fling the stone at her, but He does not do so, because God does not want "the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (cf. *Ez 33: 11*). And Jesus takes leave of the woman with these wonderful words: "Go, and from now on sin no more" (v. 11). And so Jesus opens a new way before her, created by mercy, a way that calls for the commitment not to sin again. It is an invitation that is valid for each one of us: when Jesus forgives us He always opens a new way for us to go forward. In this time of Lent, we are called to acknowledge ourselves as sinners and to ask for God's forgiveness. And forgiveness, in turn, while reconciling us and giving us peace, allows us to begin again a renewed history. Every true conversion reaches out to a new future, to a new life, a beautiful life, a life free of sin, a generous life. Let us not be afraid to ask Jesus for forgiveness, because He opens the door for us to this new life. May the Virgin Mary help us to bear witness to all the merciful love of God Who, in Jesus, forgives us and makes our existence new, always offering us new possibilities.

### **After the Angelus**

Dear brothers and sisters,

I address a warm greeting to all of you present here, faithful of Rome and of many parts of the world. Today there are many school pupils present!

I greet the Spanish students of La Coruña and Albacete; those of Telfs, Austria, and of Colmar, France.

I greet students from Bologna, Nicosia and Genova, as well as those of the Lasallian Schools of Turin and Vercelli, who commemorate the death three hundred years ago of Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle.

I address a special thought to the confirmands from Settignano, Scandicci, and those of the diocese of Saluzzo, accompanied by their bishop, Msgr. Cristiano Bodo. Be courageous witnesses to Jesus and to the Gospel! With confirmation we must always grow in courage; always be courageous!

I greet the fourteen-year-olds of the "Romana Vittoria" deanery of Milan, and the faithful of Pescara, Naples and Terni.

I wish you all a good Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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