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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis led the recitation of the Regina Caeli prayer from the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

The following are the Pope's words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The fourth Sunday of Easter, which we celebrate today, is dedicated to Jesus the Good Shepherd. The Gospel says that: "The sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10: 3). The Lord calls us by name, He calls us because He loves us. But, the Gospel then tells us, there are *other voices*, not to be followed: those of strangers, thieves and brigands who mean harm to the sheep.

These different voices resonate within us. There is the voice of God, who speaks kindly to the conscience, and there is the tempting voice that leads to evil. How can we recognise the voice of the good Shepherd rather than that of the thief, how can we distinguish the inspiration of God from the suggestion of the evil one? One can learn to discern these two voices: they speak two different languages, that is, they have opposite ways of knocking on the door of our hearts. They speak different languages. Just as we know how to distinguish one language from another, we can also distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the evil one. The voice of God never forces us: God proposes Himself, He does not impose Himself. Instead, the evil voice seduces, assails, forces: it arouses dazzling illusions, emotions that are tempting but transient. At first it flatters, it makes us believe that we are all-powerful, but then it leaves us empty inside and accuses us: "You are worth nothing". The voice of God, instead, corrects us, with great patience, but always encourages us, consoles us: it always nourishes hope. The voice of God is a voice that has a horizon, whereas the voice of evil leads you to a wall, it backs you into a corner.

Another difference. The voice of the enemy distracts us from the present and wants us to focus on fears of the future or sadness about the past - the enemy does not want the present - it brings to the surface the bitterness, the memories of the wrongs suffered, of those who have hurt us, many bad memories. Instead, the voice of God speaks to the present: "Now you can do good, now you can exercise the creativity of love, now you can renounce the regrets and remorse that hold your heart captive". It inspires us, it leads us ahead, but it speaks in the present: now.

Again: the two voices raise different questions in us. That which comes from God will be: "What is good for me?". Instead the tempter will insist on another question: "What do I feel like doing?". What I feel like: the evil voice always revolves around the ego, its impulses, its needs, *everything straight away*. It is like the tantrums of a child: everything, and now. The voice of God, instead, never promises joy at a low price: it invites us to go beyond our ego to find the true good, peace. Let us remember: evil never gives us peace, it causes frenzy first and leaves bitterness later. This is the style of evil.

The voice of God and that of the tempter, finally, speak in different "environments": the enemy prefers darkness, falsehood, and gossip; the Lord loves sunlight, truth, and sincere transparency. The enemy will say to us: "Close yourself up in yourself, besides no-one understands and listens to you, don't trust anyone!" Goodness, on the contrary, invites us to open up, to be clear and trusting in God and in others. Dear brothers and sisters, in this time so many thoughts and worries lead us to turn inwards into ourselves. Let us pay attention to the voices that reach our hearts. Let us ask ourselves where they come from. Let us ask for the grace to recognise and follow the voice of the good Shepherd, who brings us out of the enclosures of selfishness and leads us to the pastures of true freedom. May Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, guide and accompany our discernment.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Christian existence is always a response to God's call, in any state of life. This Day reminds us of what Jesus said one day, that the field of the Kingdom of God requires much work, and we must pray to the Father to send workers to work in His field (cf. *Mt 9:37-38*). Priesthood and the consecrated life require courage and perseverance; and without prayer one cannot continue along this path. I invite everyone to invoke from the Lord the gift of good workers for His Kingdom, with a heart and hands open to His love.

Once again I would like to express my closeness those who are suffering from Covid-19, to those who are dedicated to the care of all those who, in whatever way, are suffering from the pandemic. At the same time, I would like to support and encourage the international collaboration that is taking place with various initiatives to respond adequately and effectively to the serious crisis we are experiencing. It is important, in fact, to bring together scientific capacities, in a transparent and disinterested way, to find vaccines and treatments and to guarantee universal access to essential technologies that will enable every infected person, in every part of the world, to receive the necessary health care.

I address a special thought to the Association "Meter", promoter of the National Day for children who are victims of violence, exploitation and indifference. I encourage those responsible and operators to continue their work in prevention and awareness raising alongside the various educational agencies. And I thank the children from the Association who have sent me a collage with hundreds of daisies they have coloured. Thank you!

We have just started May, the quintessential Marian month, during which the faithful love to visit the Sanctuaries dedicated to Our Lady. This year, because of the health situation, let us visit these places of faith and devotion spiritually, to place in the heart of the Blessed Virgin our concerns, expectations and plans for the future.

And since prayer is a universal value, I have accepted the proposal of the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity that on this coming 14 May, believers of all religions should unite spiritually for a day of prayer, fasting, and works of charity, to implore God to help humanity overcome the coronavirus pandemic. Remember: 14 May, all believers together, believers of different traditions, to pray, fast, and perform works of charity.

I wish everyone a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and *arrivederci*.
