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The Pope's words at the Angelus Prayer

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

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Last Wednesday, with the penitential rite of the ashes, we began our Lenten journey. Today, the first Sunday of this liturgical season, the Word of God shows us the path to living fruitfully the forty days that lead to the annual celebration of Easter. It is the way Jesus trod, which the Gospel, with Mark's essential style, summarises by saying that before He began His preaching, He withdrew into the desert for forty days, where He was tempted by Satan (see 1:12-15). The Evangelist emphasises that "the Spirit - the Holy Spirit - immediately drove Him out into the wilderness" (v. 12). The Holy Spirit descended upon Him immediately after the baptism He received from John in the River Jordan; the same Spirit now impels Him to go into the desert, to face the Tempter, to combat the devil. Jesus' entire existence is placed under the sign of the Spirit of God, who animates, inspires and guides Him.

But let us think of the desert. Let us pause for a moment on this natural and symbolic environment, so important in the Bible. The desert is the place where God speaks to the heart of the human person, and where prayer is the answer, that is, the desert of solitude, the heart detached from other things, and which only in that solitude opens itself to the Word of God. But it is also the place of trial and temptation, where the Tempter, taking advantage of human frailty and needs, insinuates his lying voice, as an alternative to God's, an alternative voice that makes you see another road, another road of deception. The Tempter seduces. Indeed, during the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert, the "duel" between Jesus and the devil begins, which will end with the Passion and the Cross. Christ's entire ministry is a struggle against the Evil One in its many manifestations:

healing from illnesses, exorcising the possessed, forgiving sins. It is a struggle. After the first phase in which Jesus demonstrates that He speaks and acts with the power of God, it seems that the devil has the upper hand, when the Son of God is rejected, abandoned and finally captured and condemned to death. He has conquered the devil, it seems. It seems that He is the winner. In reality, death was the last “desert” to cross in order to finally defeat Satan and free us all from his power. And in this way Jesus won in the desert of death, so as to win in the Resurrection.

Every year, at the beginning of Lent, this Gospel of the temptations of Jesus in the desert reminds us that the life of the Christian, in the footsteps of the Lord, is a battle against the spirit of evil. It shows us that Jesus willingly faced the Tempter, and defeated him; and at the same time it reminds us that the devil is granted the possibility of acting on us too, with his temptations. We must be aware of the presence of this astute enemy, who seeks our eternal condemnation, our failure, and prepare to defend ourselves against him and to combat him. The grace of God assures us, with faith, prayer and penance, of our victory over the enemy. But I would like to underline one thing: in the temptations, Jesus never enters into dialogue with the devil, never. In his life Jesus never had a dialogue with the devil, never. Either He banishes them from the possessed or He condemns him, or He shows his malice, but never a dialogue. And in the desert it seems that there is a dialogue because the devil makes three proposals and Jesus responds. But Jesus does not respond with his words. He answers with the Word of God, with three passages of Scripture. And this, for all of us. When the seducer approaches, he begins to seduce us: “But think of this, do that...”, the temptation is to dialogue with him, as Eve did. Eve said: “But you can’t, because we...”, and entered into dialogue. And if we enter into dialogue with the devil we will be defeated. Keep this in your head and in your heart: you can never enter into dialogue with the devil, no dialogue is possible. Only the Word of God.

During the Season of Lent, the Holy Spirit drives us too, like Jesus, into the desert. It is not, as we have seen, a physical place, but rather an existential dimension in which we can be silent and listen to the word of God, “so that a true conversion might be effected in us” (*Collect, First Sunday of Lent, B*, translated from the Italian). Do not be afraid of the desert, seek out moments of more prayer, of silence, to enter into us. Do not be afraid. We are called to walk in God’s footsteps, renewing our Baptismal promises: renouncing Satan, and all his works and all his empty promises. The enemy is crouching there, beware. But never dialogue with him. Let us entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I address a warm greeting to you all, Romans and pilgrims. In particular, I greet the Polish faithful who are here in front. Today my thoughts go to the Shrine of Płock in Poland, where ninety years ago the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to Saint Faustina Kowalska, entrusting a special message of divine mercy to her. Through Saint John Paul II this message reached the entire world, and it is none other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and who gives us His Father’s mercy. Let us open our heart, saying with faith, “Jesus, I trust in You”.

I greet the young people and adults of the *Talitha Kum* group of the *San Giovanni dei Fiorentini* parish in Rome. Thank you for your presence, and continue with joy in your good works.

And I wish you all a beautiful Sunday, beautiful, in the sunshine, and a blessed Sunday!

And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
