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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, at the end of Holy Mass in the Vatican Basilica to conclude the first Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (4 to 29 October 2023) on the theme: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission", 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!*

Today's Gospel speaks to us about the *greatest of the commandments* (cf. *Mt 22:34-40*). A doctor of the law questions Jesus about this and He responds with the "great commandment of love": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (...) and (...) your neighbour as yourself" (vv. 37.39). Love of God and neighbour are inseparable from each other. So, let us pause a bit to reflect on this.

The first: the fact that love for the Lord comes first reminds us that *God always precedes us*, he anticipates us with his infinite tenderness (cf. *Jn 4:19*), with his closeness, with his mercy, for He is always near, tender and merciful. A baby learns to love on their mommy's and daddy's knees, and we learn it in God's arms. The Psalm says, "Like a weaned child in the arms of its mother" (cf. 131:2). This is how we should feel in God's arms. And there, we absorb the Lord's affection; there, we encounter the love that impels us to give ourselves generously. Saint Paul recalls this when he says that the charity of Christ possesses a power that propels toward loving (cf. 2 *Cor 5:14*). And everything originates in Him. You cannot truly love others if you do not have this root, which is love of God, love for Jesus.

And now the second aspect that emerges from the commandment of love. It connects love for God to love for

neighbour: it means that by loving our brothers and sisters, we reflect the Father's love like mirrors. *To reflect God's love*, this is the point – to love Him whom we do not see through the brother/sisters whom we do see (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). One day, Saint Teresa of Calcutta responded to a journalist who asked her if she had illusions about changing the world by what she was doing, "Me? No, I never thought I could change the world! I only wanted to be a drop of clean water, through which God's love could shine" (Meeting with journalists after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Rome, 1979). This is how she, who was so little, was able to do so much good – by reflecting God's love like a drop. And if at times, looking at her and other saints, we might be moved to think that they are heroes that cannot be imitated, let us think again about that small drop: love is a drop that can change many things. And how can this be done? Taking the first step, always. Sometimes it is not easy to take the first step, to forget things..., to take the first step – let's do that. This is the drop – to take the first step.

So, dear brothers and sisters, thinking about God's love that always precedes us, we can ask ourselves: Am I grateful to the Lord that he loves me first? Do I feel God's love and am I grateful to him? And do I try to reflect His love? Do I strive to love my brothers and sisters, and take this second step?

May the Virgin Mary help us live the great commandment of love in our daily life: to love and to allow God to love us, and to love our brothers and sisters.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank all those who -- in so many places and in various ways – united themselves to the day of fasting, prayer and penance that we lived last Friday, imploring peace for the world. Let us not stop. Let us continue to pray for Ukraine, as well as for the serious situation in Palestine and Israel, and for other regions at war. Particularly, in Gaza, may space be opened to guarantee humanitarian aid, and may the hostages be released right away. Let no one abandon the possibility that the weapons might be silenced – let there be a ceasefire. Father Ibrahim Faltas, whom I heard recently on the program *A Sua Immagine*, Father Ibrahim was saying: "Let the arms cease! Let the arms cease!" He is the vicar of the Holy Land. With Father Ibrahim, let us too say: let the arms cease. Stop, brothers and sisters! war is always a defeat — always!

I am near to the population in the area of Acapulco, in Mexico, hit by a very powerful hurricane. I am praying for the victims, for their families and for those who have sustained serious harm. May the Virgin of Guadalupe sustain her children in this hardship.

I greet all of you, people from Rome and pilgrims from Italy and from many parts of the world. In particular, I greet the parents of "children in Heaven" from Torano Nuovo, members of the faithful from Campana, the vocational group "Talità Kum" from the parish of Saint John of the Florentines in Rome, the boys and girls from the Confirmation class who have come from Slovenia and those from Gandosso, as well as the pilgrimage of the Children of Saint Camillus and the Ministers of the Sick.

I hope all of you enjoy your Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your meal and *arrivederci!*
