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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis prayed the Angelus in live link from the Santa Marta chapel.

The introductory reflection and the words following the Marian prayer were read by Msgr. Paolo Braida:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Today too I will not be able to read everything: I am getting better, but my voice is still not good. Monsignor Braida will read the catechesis.

Today, first Sunday of Advent, in the brief Gospel the liturgy offers us (cf. *Mk* 13: 33-37), Jesus addresses a simple and direct exhortation to us, three times: "Watch" (vv. 33, 35, 37).

Thus, the theme is *vigilance*. How should we understand it? Sometimes we think of this virtue as an attitude motivated by fear of impending doom, as if a meteorite were about to plunge from the sky and threaten, if we do not avoid it in time, to overwhelm us. But this is certainly not what Christian vigilance is all about!

Jesus illustrates it with a parable, speaking about a master who will return, and about his servants who await him (cf. v. 34). The servant in the Bible is the "trusted person" of the master, with whom there is often a relationship of collaboration and affection. Think, for example, that Moses is defined as the servant of God (cf. *Nm* 12: 7), and that even Mary says of herself, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1: 38). So, the servants' vigilance is not one of fear, but of longing, of waiting to go forth to meet their Lord who is coming. They remain in readiness for his return because they care for him, because they have in mind that when he returns, they will make him find a welcoming and orderly home; they are happy to see him, to the point that they look forward to his return as a feast for the whole great family of which they are a part.

It is with this expectation filled with affection that we also want to prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus: at Christmas, which we will celebrate in a few weeks; at the end of time, when He will return in glory; every day, as He comes to meet us in the Eucharist, in His Word, in our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need.

So, in a special way during these weeks, let us prepare the house of the heart with care, so that it is orderly and hospitable. In fact, keeping watch means keeping the heart ready. It is the attitude of the sentinel, who in the night is not tempted by weariness, does not fall asleep, but remains awake awaiting the coming light. The Lord is our light and it is good to dispose the heart to welcome him with prayer and to host him with charity, the two preparations that, so to speak, make him comfortable. In this regard, the story goes that Saint Martin of Tours, a man of prayer, after giving half of his cloak to a poor man, dreamed of Jesus clad in that very part of the cloak he had given. Here is a good program for Advent: to encounter Jesus coming in every brother and sister who needs us and to share with them what we can: listening, time, concrete assistance.

Dear friends, it will be good for us today to ask ourselves how we can prepare a welcoming heart for the Lord. We can do so by approaching His forgiveness, His Word, His Table, finding space for prayer, welcoming those in need. Let us cultivate His expectation without letting ourselves be distracted by so many pointless things, and without complaining all the time, but keeping our hearts alert, that is, eager for Him, awake and ready, impatient to meet Him.

May the Virgin Mary, woman of expectation, help us to receive her coming Son.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

In Israel and Palestine the situation is serious. It pains us that the truce has been broken: this means death, destruction, misery. Many hostages have been freed, but many are still in Gaza. Let us think about them, their families who had seen a light, a hope to embrace their loved ones again. In Gaza there is much suffering; there is a lack of basic necessities. I hope that all those who are involved may reach a new ceasefire agreement as soon as possible and find solutions other than weapons, trying to take courageous paths to peace.

I wish to assure my prayer for the victims of the attack that occurred this morning in the Philippines, where a bomb exploded during Mass. I am close to the families and the people of Mindanao, who have already suffered so much.

Albeit at a distance, I follow the work of COP 28 in Dubai with great attention. I am close. I reiterate my appeal for a response to climate change with *concrete* political changes; let us come out of the straits of particularism and nationalism, mindsets of the past, and embrace a common vision, all making every effort now, without delay, for a necessary global conversion.

Today is International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Welcoming and including those who experience this condition helps society as a whole to become more humane. In families, in parishes, in schools, at work, in sport: let us learn to value every person with his or her qualities and abilities, excluding no-one.

I greet you all affectionately, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and other parts of the world, in particular the Polish people taking part in the events organized in Rome in honour of the Ulma martyr family, recently beatified.

I greet all the pilgrims and parish groups from Florence, Siena, Brindisi, Cosenza and Adrano.

I wish you all a good Sunday and a good Advent journey. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch,

and *arrivederci!*
