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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 to pray the Angelus with the faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

On this third Sunday of Advent – *Gaudete Sunday* – the children and young people of the oratories and schools of Rome, accompanied by the animators of the Centre for Roman Oratories, were present for the traditional blessing of the "Bambinelli", little statuettes of the infant Jesus.

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

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Today, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Gospel speaks to us about John the Baptist's mission (cf. *Jn* 1:6-8, 19-28), indicating that he is the prophet sent by God to "testify to the light" (v. 8). Let us reflect on this: *to testify to the light*.

Testimony. The Baptist is certainly an extraordinary man. The people flock to listen to him, attracted by his consistent and sincere way of being (cf. vv. 6-7). His testimony comes through his frank language, his honest behaviour, his austerity of life. All this makes him different from other famous and powerful people of that time, who, instead, invested a lot in appearances. People like him – upright, free and courageous – are luminous, fascinating figures: they motivate us to rise above mediocrity and to be in turn models of good living for others. In every age, the Lord sends men and women like this. Do we know how to recognize them? Do we try to learn from their witness, allowing ourselves to be challenged? Or rather, do we allow ourselves to be bedazzled by fashionable people? Then we get caught in artificial behaviour.

John instead is luminous insofar as he testifies *to the light*. But what is his light? He himself responds when he states clearly to the crowds who had flocked to hear him that he was not the light, that he was not the Messiah (cf. vv. 19-20). The light is Jesus, the Lamb of God, “God who saves”. Only He redeems, frees, heals and enlightens. This is why John is a “voice” who accompanies his brothers and sisters to the Word; he serves without seeking honours or the spotlight: he is a lamp, while the light is the living Christ (cf. vv. 26-27; *Jn* 5:35)

Brothers and sisters, the example of John the Baptist teaches us at least two things. First, that we cannot save ourselves alone: only in God do we find the *light* of life. And second, that each of us, through service, consistency, humility, witness of life – and always by God’s grace – can be a lamp that shines and helps others find the way on which to meet Jesus.

So, let us ask ourselves: In the places I live, how can I *testify to the light*, testify to Christ in the here and now this Christmas, not in the distant future?

May Mary, mirror of holiness, help us be men and women who reflect Jesus, the light who comes into the world.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Yesterday in the Shrine of Our Lady of Luján in Argentina, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio was beatified, a humble and zealous pastor, a witness of hope, defender of the poor. He collaborated with Saint John Paul II in the promotion of lay people and World Youth Day. May his example help us to be a Church that goes out, that accompanies everyone on their way, especially the weakest. A round of applause for the new Blessed!

Today I want to remember the thousands of migrants who try to cross through the Darién jungle between Colombia and Panama. It’s often families with children who venture along dangerous paths, deceived by those who falsely promise them short and safe passage, mistreated and robbed. Not a few lose their lives in the jungle. Combined efforts are needed by the countries more directly affected and the international community to prevent this tragic situation from passing unnoticed, and to provide together a humanitarian response.

And let us not forget our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of war, in Ukraine, in Palestine and Israel, and in other conflict zones. As Christmas approaches, may the dedication to open paths of peace be strengthened.

I continue receiving very serious and sad news about Gaza. Unarmed civilians are targets for bombs and gunfire. And this has happened even within the parish complex of the Holy Family, where there are no terrorists, but families, children, people who are sick and have disabilities, sisters. A mother and her daughter, Mrs. Nahida Khalil Anton and her daughter Samar Kamal Anton, were killed, and other people were wounded by the shooters while they were going to the bathroom... The house of the Sisters of Mother Teresa was damaged, their generator was hit. Some are saying, “This is terrorism and war”. Yes, it is war, it is terrorism. That is why Scripture says that “God puts an end to war...the bow he breaks and the spear he snaps” (cf. *Ps* 46:9). Let us pray to the Lord for peace.

I greet all of you, families, parish groups and associations, who have come to Rome from Italy and so many parts of the world. In particular, I greet the pilgrims from the United States of America and Poland; the faithful from Mormanno, Acilia and Viterbo.

And now I greet you, dear children from the oratories and schools in Rome who have brought your Baby Jesus figurines to be blessed. I bless them. In blessing your *Bambinelli*, I ask that you pray before the Nativity scene for children who will experience a difficult Christmas in places where there is war, in refugee camps, in situations

of profound misery. Thank you for doing this, and Merry Christmas to all of you and your families. A round of applause for the children!

I wish a Happy Sunday to you all. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your meal and *arrivederci!*
