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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, happy Sunday!

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Gospel presents the scene of the Annunciation (cf. *Lk* 1:26-39). Explaining to Mary how she will conceive Jesus, the angel tells her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35). Let us pause for a moment on this image, *shadow*.

In a perpetually sunny land like Mary's, a passing cloud, a tree that resists drought and offers shelter, or a hospitable tent can bring relief and protection. Shade is a gift that refreshes, and the angel describes how the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary, and that this is God's way of acting: God always acts as a gentle love that embraces, that fertilises, that protects, without doing violence, without infringing freedom. This is God's way of acting.

The idea of the protecting shade is a recurring image in the Bible. We think of the shadow that accompanies God's people in the desert (cf. *Ex* 13:21-22), In a word, "shadow" describes God's *kindness*. It is as if He were saying, to Mary but also to all of us today: "I am here for you and I offer myself as your refuge and your shelter: come under my shadow, stay with me". Brothers and sisters, this is how God's fruitful love operates. And it is also something that, in a certain way, we can experience among ourselves; for example, when among friends, couples, spouses, parents and children, we are gentle, we are respectful, caring for others with kindness. Let us reflect on the God's kindness.

This is how God loves, and He calls us to do the same: welcoming, protecting, and respecting others. Think of everyone, think of those who are marginalised, those who are far from the joy of Christmas these days. Let us think about everyone with God's kindness. Remember this word: the kindness of God.

And so, on Christmas Eve, let us ask ourselves: "Do I desire to allow myself to be enveloped by the shadow of the Holy Spirit, by the gentleness and meekness of God, by the kindness of the God, making room for Him in my heart, drawing near to His forgiveness, to the Eucharist?" And then: "For which lonely and needy people could I be a refreshing shadow, a comforting friendship?"

May Mary help us to be open and welcoming to the presence of God, Who with meekness comes to save us.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and from various parts of the world. In particular, I greet the delegation of Italian citizens who live in territories officially recognised as highly polluted and who have long awaited their clean-up. I express solidarity with these populations and hope that their voices will be heard.

I wish you all a happy Sunday and a Christmas Eve in prayer, in the warmth of affection, and in sobriety. Let me make one recommendation: let us not confuse celebration with consumerism! We can – and as Christians we must – celebrate in simplicity, without waste, and by sharing with those who lack necessities or lack companionship. We are close to our brothers and sisters who suffer from war. We think of Palestine, Israel, Ukraine. We also think of those who suffer from misery, from hunger, from slavery. May the God who took a human heart for Himself infuse humanity into the hearts of men!

And please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch! And Merry Christmas to all! *Arrivederci!*
