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Greetings to faithful and pilgrims

At the end of today's general audience, in the greetings to pilgrims from different countries, the Pope gave thanks to all those who had wished him a happy birthday in advance, as the Pope was born on 17 December 1936. "I would like to tell you something that will make you laugh. In my country, to congratulate in advance brings bad luck and is a 'gaffe'".

He then greeted, among others, the new Italian priests of the Legionaries of Christ and seminarians from Brescia, expressing his hope that they would all live their priesthood with authenticity, a spirit of service and the capacity for mediation between the grace of God and the fragility of the human condition. "The capacity for mediation", he emphasised, "means being mediators, not intermediaries".

He also welcomed faithful from Petignano d'Assisi, and thanked them for the gift of an artistic Nativity scene; soldiers engaged in Operation Safe Streets for the Jubilee; and the Group of Catholic Insurance Agents, who celebrate the seventieth anniversary of their activity.

Finally, he addressed the young, the sick and newly-weds. Today we celebrate the liturgical memory of St. John of the Cross, a "zealous pastor and mystic doctor of the Church. Dear young people, meditate on the greatness of the love of Jesus, Who was born and died for us; dear sick people, accept your cross meekly, in union with Christ for the conversion of sinners; and you, dear newly-weds, give more space to prayer especially in this Time of Advent, so that your life become a path of Christian perfection".
