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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

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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.

On this third Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete Sunday*), the children of the *Centro Oratori Romani* (COR), parishes and families of Rome were present for the blessing of the "bambinelli", images of the baby Jesus.

The following is the Pope's introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

On this third Sunday of Advent, known as the Sunday "of joy", the Word of God invites us on the one hand to joy, and on the other hand to the awareness that existence also includes moments of doubt, in which it is difficult to believe. *Joy and doubt* are both experiences that are part of our lives.

To the explicit invitation to joy of the prophet Isaiah: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom" (35: 1), the Gospel opposes the doubt of John the Baptist: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (*Mt* 11: 3). Indeed, the prophet sees beyond the situation; he discouraged people before him: weak hands, trembling knees, lost hearts (cf. 35: 3-4). It is the same reality that in every age puts faith to the test. But the man of God looks beyond, because the Holy Spirit makes his heart feel the power of His promise, and he announces salvation: "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance" (v. 4). And then everything is transformed: the desert blooms, consolation and joy take possession of the lost of heart, the lame, the blind, the mute are healed (cf. vv. 5-6). This is what is realized with Jesus: "The blind receive

their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (*Mt* 11: 5).

This description shows us that salvation envelops the whole person and regenerates him. But this new birth, with the joy that accompanies it, always presupposes a death to ourselves and to the sin within us. Hence the call to conversion, which is the basis of the preaching of both the Baptist and Jesus; in particular, it is a question of converting our idea of God. And the time of Advent stimulates us to do this precisely with the question that John the Baptist poses to Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (*Mt* 11: 3). We think: all his life John waited for the Messiah; his lifestyle, his very body is shaped by this expectation. This is also why Jesus praises him with those words: no one is greater than him among those born of a woman (cf. *Mt* 11: 11). Yet he too had to convert to Jesus. Like John, we too are called to recognize the face that God chose to assume in Jesus Christ, humble and merciful.

Advent is a time of grace. It tells us that it is not enough to believe in God: it is necessary to purify our faith every day. It is a matter of preparing ourselves to welcome not a fairy-tale character, but the God who challenges us, involves us and before whom a choice is imposed. The Child who lies in the manger has the face of our brothers and sisters most in need, of the poor who are “a privileged part of this mystery; often they are the first to recognize God’s presence in our midst” (Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum*, 6).

May the Virgin Mary help us so that, as we approach Christmas, let us not allow ourselves to be distracted by external things, but make room in our hearts for the One Who has already come and Who wishes to come again to heal our illnesses and to give us His joy.

After the Angelus, the Pope continued:

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all, families, parish groups, and associations, who have come to Rome from Italy and from many parts of the world. In particular I greet the pilgrims from Korea, from Valencia and the group from Rotzo (VI).

I greet you, dear young people, who have come with your figurines of the baby Jesus for your Nativity display. Lift up your figurines! I bless them from my heart. “The Nativity scene is like a living Gospel. ... As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God Who became man in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realize that so great is His love for us that He become one of us, so that we in turn might become one with Him” (cf. Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum*, 1).

In less than a year, from 13 to 20 September 2020, the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress will be held in Budapest. The Eucharistic Congresses, for more than a century, have reminded us that the Eucharist is at the centre of the life of the Church. The theme of the next Congress will be “All my springs are in you” (*Psalms* 87: 7). Let us pray that “the Budapest Eucharistic Congress foster processes of renewal in Christian communities” (*Address to the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses*, 10 November 2018).

And I wish you all a good Sunday and a good Christmas Novena. You young people, take the *bambinelli* for the Nativity display and please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and *arrivederci*.
