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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 is the Pope's introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In this fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 1: 18-24) guides us towards Christmas through the experience of Saint Joseph, a figure seemingly in second place, but whose attitude encapsulates all Christian wisdom. He, together with John the Baptist and Mary, is one of the characters whom the liturgy proposes to us for the time of Advent; and of the three he is the most modest. He is one who does not preach, does not speak, but tries to do God's will; and he does it in the style of the Gospel and the Beatitudes. Let us think of: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt* 5: 3). And Joseph is poor because he lives on what is essential, he works, he lives by his work; it is the poverty typical of those who are aware that they depend on God for everything, and place all their trust in Him.

Today's Gospel passage presents a situation that is in human terms embarrassing and conflicting. Joseph and Mary are betrothed; they do not yet live together, but she is expecting a child by the work of God. Joseph, faced with this surprise, is naturally disturbed but, instead of reacting in an impulsive and punitive manner – as was the custom, the law protected him – he seeks a solution that respects the dignity and integrity of his beloved Mary. The Gospel says so: "And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly" (v. 19). Joseph knew that if he denounced his betrothed, he would expose her to serious consequences, even death. He had full faith in Mary, whom he chose as his bride. He does not understand, but he seeks another solution.

This inexplicable circumstance leads him to question their bond; therefore, with great suffering, he decides to detach himself from Mary without creating scandal. But the Angel of the Lord intervenes to tell him that the solution he proposes is not the one desired by God. On the contrary, the Lord opened a new path for him, a path of union, love and happiness, and said to him: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife. For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (v. 20).

At this point, Joseph trusts God totally, obeys the Angel's words and takes Mary with him. It was precisely this unshakable trust in God that enabled him to accept a humanly difficult and, in a certain sense, incomprehensible situation. Joseph understands, in faith, that the child born in Mary's womb is not his child, but the Son of God, and he, Joseph, will be its guardian, fully assuming its earthly paternity. The example of this gentle and wise man exhorts us to lift up our gaze and push it further. It is a question of recovering the surprising logic of God which, far from small or great calculations, is made up of openness towards new horizons, towards Christ and His Word.

May the Virgin Mary and her chaste husband Joseph help us to listen to Jesus Who comes, and Who asks to be welcomed in our plans and in our choices.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet all of you, the faithful of Rome and pilgrims from Italy and various countries.

In particular, I greet the delegation of Italian citizens who live in seriously polluted areas and who aspire to a better quality of the environment and a just protection of health.

In three days it will be Christmas and my thoughts go especially to your families, to your families, who are reunited in these festive days: those who live far from their parents leave and return home; the brothers and sisters trying to see each other. May Holy Christmas be for all an occasion of fraternity, of growth in faith and gestures of solidarity with those in need. And may Saint Joseph accompany us on this journey towards Christmas.

I wish you a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and *arrivederci*.
