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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis led the recitation of the Regina Caeli prayer from the library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

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

Before the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters, good day!

Today, in Italy and in other countries, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated. The Gospel reading (cf. *Mt* 28: 16-20) shows us the Apostles who gather in Galilee, "to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go" (v. 16). Here the Lord's final encounter with His followers takes place, on the mountain. The "mountain" has a strong symbolic and reminiscent charge. Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes on the Mount (see *Mt* 5: 1-12); He withdrew to the mountains to pray (see *Mt* 14: 23). He welcomed the crowds there and healed the sick (see *Mt*, 15: 29). But this time, on the mountain, He is no longer the Master who acts and teaches, but He is the Risen One who asks the disciples to act and to proclaim, entrusting to them the mandate to continue His work.

He invests them with the mission to all the peoples. He says: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (vv. 19-20). The contents of the mission entrusted to the Apostles are these: to proclaim, baptise, teach and walk the path traced out by the Master, that is, the Gospel. This message of salvation implies first of all the duty of witness - without witness one cannot proclaim - to which we too, the disciples of today, are called to explain why we believe. Faced with such a demanding task, and thinking of our weaknesses, we feel inadequate, as the Apostles themselves surely felt. But we must not be discouraged, remembering the words Jesus addressed to them before ascending to Heaven: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (v. 20).

This promise ensures the constant and consoling presence of Jesus among us. But how is this presence realised? Through His Spirit, who leads the Church as it walks through history as the companion of every person. That Spirit, sent by Christ and the Father, works the remission of sins and sanctifies all those who are repentant and open themselves with confidence to His gift. With the promise to remain with us until the end of time, Jesus inaugurates the style of His presence in the world as the Risen One. Jesus is present in the world but with another style, the style of the Risen One, that is a presence that is revealed in the Word, in the Sacraments, in the constant and interior action of the Holy Spirit. The Feast of the Ascension tells us that Jesus, although He ascended to Heaven to dwell gloriously at the right hand of the Father, is still and is always among us: this is the source of our strength, our perseverance and our joy, from the presence of Jesus among us with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

May the Virgin Mary accompany our journey with her maternal protection. From her may we learn the gentleness and courage to be witnesses in the world of the Risen Lord.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters,

Let us join spiritually with the Catholic faithful in China, who today celebrate with particular devotion the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians and Patroness of China, venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. Let us entrust to the guidance and protection of our Heavenly Mother the Pastors and faithful of the Catholic Church in that great country, so that they may be strong in faith and steadfast in fraternal union, joyful witnesses and promoters of charity and fraternal hope, and good citizens.

Dearest Catholic brothers and sisters in China, I wish to assure you that the universal Church, of which you are an integral part, shares your hopes and supports you in your trials of life. She accompanies you with prayer for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the light and beauty of the Gospel may shine in you as the power of God for the salvation of whoever believes. In expressing to you all once again my great and sincere affection, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing. May Our Lady keep you always!

Finally, let us entrust to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians all the Lord's disciples and all the people of good will who in this difficult time, in every part of the world, committedly and passionately work for peace, for dialogue between nations, for service to the poor, for the care of creation and for the victory of humanity over every disease of body, heart and soul.

Today is World Communications Day, dedicated this year to the theme of storytelling. May this event encourage us to tell and share constructive stories that help us to understand that we are all part of a story that is larger than ourselves, and can look forward to the future with hope if we truly care for one another as brothers and sisters.

Today, on the day of Mary Help of Christians, I address an affectionate and cordial greeting to the Salesians. I recall with gratitude the spiritual formation I received from the sons and daughters of Don Bosco.

Today I was supposed to go to Acerra to support the faith of that population and the commitment of those who are working to counter the drama of pollution in the so-called "Land of Fire". My visit has been postponed. However, I send my greetings, my blessing and encouragement to the Bishop, the priests, the families and the entire diocesan community, as we look forward to meeting each other as soon as possible. I will go there, for sure!

And today is also the fifth anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, with which I sought to draw attention to the cry of the earth and of the poor. Thanks to the initiative of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the “*Laudato si'* Week” we have just celebrated will blossom into a special Year of the anniversary of *Laudato si'*, a special year to reflect on the Encyclical, from 24 May this year until 24 May next year. I invite all people of good will to join in, to take care of our common home and our most fragile brothers and sisters. The prayer dedicated to this Year will be published on the site. It will be good to pray it.

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

Prayer for the special year of the anniversary of *Laudato si'*

Loving God,

Creator of Heaven, Earth, and all therein contained.

Open our minds and touch our hearts,

so that we can be part of Creation, your gift.

Be present to those in need in these difficult times,

especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Help us to show creative solidarity

as we confront the consequences of the global pandemic.

Make us courageous in embracing

the changes required to seek the common good.

Now more than ever, may we all feel interconnected and interdependent.

Enable us to succeed in listening and responding

to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

May their current sufferings become the birth-pangs

of a more fraternal and sustainable world.

We pray through Christ our Lord,

under the loving gaze of Mary Help of Christians,

Amen.
