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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 his introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Good afternoon!

With the narrative of the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, in today's Gospel passage (cf. Mt 22:1-14), Jesus outlines the plan that God envisaged for humanity. The king who "who gave a marriage feast for his son" (v. 2) is the image of the Father who prepared for the entire human family a wonderful celebration of love and communion around his only begotten Son. Twice the king sends his servants to call the invited guests, but they refuse; they do not want to go to the feast because they have other things to think about: fields and business. We often also put our interests and material things ahead of the Lord who calls us — and he calls us to a feast. But the king in the parable does not want the hall to remain empty, because he wants to offer the treasures of his kingdom. So he tells his servants: "Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find" (v. 9). This is how God reacts: when he is rejected, rather than giving up, he starts over and asks that all those found at the thoroughfares be called, excluding no one. No one is excluded from the house of God.

The original term that Matthew the Evangelist uses refers to the limits of the roads, or those points at which the city streets end and the paths begin that lead to the area of the countryside, outside the residential area, where life is precarious. It is to this humanity of the thoroughfares that the king in the parable sends his servants, in the certainty of finding people willing to sit at the table. Thus the banquet hall is filled with the "excluded", those who

are “outside”, those who never seemed worthy to partake in a feast, in a wedding banquet. In fact, the master, the king, tells the messengers: “Call everyone, both good and bad. Everyone!”. God even calls those who are bad. “No, I am bad; I have done many [bad things]...”. He calls you: “Come, come, come!”. And Jesus went to lunch with the publicans, who were public sinners; they were the bad ones. God is not afraid of our spirits wounded by many cruelties, because he loves us; he invites us. And the Church is called to reach the daily thoroughfares, that is, the geographic and existential peripheries of humanity, those places on the margins, those situations where the hopeless remnants of humanity camp out and live. It is a matter of not settling for comforts and the customary ways of evangelization and witnessing to charity, but rather of opening the doors of our hearts and our communities to everyone, because the Gospel is not reserved to a select few. Even those on the margins, even those who are rejected and scorned by society, are considered by God to be worthy of his love. He prepares his banquet for everyone: the just and sinners, good and bad, intelligent and uneducated.

Yesterday evening, I was able to make a phone call to an elderly Italian priest, a missionary in Brazil since youth, but always working with the excluded, with the poor. And he lives his old age in peace: he burned up his life with the poor. This is our Mother Church; this is God’s messenger who goes to the crossroads.

However, the Lord places one condition: to wear a wedding garment. Let us return to the parable. When the hall is full, the king arrives and greets the latest guests, but he sees one of them without a wedding garment, that kind of little cape that each guest received as a gift at the entrance. The people went as they were dressed, as they were able to dress; they were not wearing gala attire. But they were given a type of capelet, a gift, at the entrance. That man, having rejected the free gift, excluded himself: thus, the king could do nothing but throw him out. This man accepted the invitation but then decided that it meant nothing to him: he was a self-sufficient person; he had no desire to change or to allow the Lord to change him. The wedding garment — this capelet — symbolizes the mercy that God freely gives us, namely, grace. Without grace we cannot take a step forward in Christian life. Everything is grace. It is not enough to accept the invitation to follow the Lord; one must be open to a journey of conversion, which changes the heart. The garment of mercy, which God offers us unceasingly, is the free gift of his love; it is precisely grace. And it demands to be welcomed with astonishment and joy: “Thank you, Lord, for having given me this gift”.

May Mary Most Holy help us to imitate the servants in the Gospel parable by emerging from our frames of mind and from our narrow views, proclaiming to everyone that the Lord invites us to his banquet, in order to offer us his saving grace, to give us his gift.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters! I would like to express my closeness to the populations impacted by the fires that are devastating so many regions of the Planet, as well as to the volunteers and firefighters who risk their lives to extinguish the blazes. I am thinking of the West Coast of the United States, particularly California, and I am also thinking of the central regions of South America, of the Pantanal area of Paraguay, of the banks of the Paraná River in Argentina. Many fires are caused by persistent drought, but there are also those caused by man. May the Lord sustain those who are suffering the consequences of these catastrophes and make us careful to preserve creation.

I appreciate that there has been a ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan for humanitarian reasons, in view of reaching a substantial peace accord. Although the truce appears too fragile, I encourage that it be taken up again and I express my participation in the sorrow for the loss of human lives, for the suffering endured, as well as for the destruction of homes and places of worship. I pray and invite prayer for the victims and for all those whose lives are in danger.

Yesterday, in Assisi, Carlo Acutis, a 15-year-old youth enamoured of the Eucharist, was beatified. He did not ease into comfortable immobilism, but understood the needs of his time, because he saw the face of Christ in the weakest. His witness indicates to today’s young people that true happiness is found by putting God in first

place and serving Him in our brothers and sisters, especially the least. A round of applause for the new young Blessed!

I would like to recall the prayer intention that I proposed for this month of October: which goes like this: We pray that the laity, especially women, may participate more in areas of responsibility in the Church. Because none of us was baptized neither priest nor bishop: we were all baptized as lay persons, male and female. Lay people are the protagonists of the Church. Today there is a need to broaden the spaces of a more vivid feminine presence in the Church, and of a lay presence, of course, but underscoring the feminine aspect, because in general women are left aside. We must promote the integration of women in places in which important decisions are taken. Let us pray that, by virtue of baptism, the lay faithful, especially women, may participate more in the institutions of responsibility in the Church, without falling into the clericalisms that nullify the lay charism and also tarnish the face of the Holy Mother Church.

Next Sunday, 18 October, the *Aid to the Church in Need Foundation* promotes the “One Million Children Praying the Rosary” campaign for unity and peace. I encourage this beautiful event that involves children throughout the world, who will pray especially for critical situations caused by the pandemic.

I greet all of you, people of Rome and pilgrims from various countries: families, parish groups, associations and individual faithful. I wish everyone a happy Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch.

Arrivederci!
