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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 introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good day!

This Sunday's Gospel reading (see *Mt 22: 15-21*) shows us Jesus struggling with the hypocrisy of His adversaries. They pay Him many compliments - at the beginning, many compliments - but then ask an insidious question to put Him in trouble and discredit Him before the people. They ask him: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (v. 17), that is, to pay their taxes to the emperor. At that time, in Palestine, the domination of the Roman Empire was poorly tolerated - and it is understandable, they were invaders - also for religious reasons. For the people, the worship of the emperor, underscored also by his image on coins, was an insult to the God of Israel. Jesus' interlocutors are convinced that there is no alternative to their questioning: either a "yes" or a "no". They were waiting, precisely because they were sure to back Jesus into a corner with this question, and to make Him fall in the trap. But He knows their wickedness and avoids the pitfall. He asks them to show Him the coin, the coin of the taxes, takes it in His hands and asks whose is the imprinted image. They answer that it is Caesar's, that is, the Emperor's. Then Jesus replies: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (v. 21).

With this reply, Jesus places Himself above the controversy. Jesus, always above. On the one hand, He acknowledges that the tribute to Caesar must be paid - for all of us too, taxes must be paid - because the image on the coin is his; but above all He recalls that each person carries within him another image - we carry it in the heart, in the soul - that of God, and therefore it is to Him, and to Him alone, that each person owes his own existence, her own life.

In this sentence of Jesus we find not only the criterion for the distinction between the political sphere and the

religious sphere; clear guidelines emerge for the mission of all believers of all times, even for us today. To pay taxes is a duty of citizens, as is complying with the just laws of the state. At the same time, it is necessary to affirm God's primacy in human life and in history, respecting God's right over all that belongs to Him.

Hence the mission of the Church and Christians: to speak of God and bear witness to Him to the men and women of our time. Every one of us, by Baptism, is called to be a living presence in society, inspiring it with the Gospel and with the lifeblood of the Holy Spirit. It is a question of committing oneself with humility, and at the same time with courage, making one's own contribution to building the civilisation of love, where justice and fraternity reign.

May Mary Most Holy help us all to flee from all hypocrisy and to be honest and constructive citizens. And may she sustain us disciples of Christ in the mission to bear witness that God is the centre and the meaning of life.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

Today we celebrate World Mission Day, which has the theme "*Here I am, send me. Weavers of fraternity*". It is beautiful, this word "weavers": every Christian is called to be a weaver of fraternity. Missionaries and missionaries - priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people -, who sow the Gospel in the great field of the world, are especially so. Let us pray for them and give them our practical support. In this context I would like to thank God for the long-awaited liberation of Father Pier Luigi Maccalli... - we greet him with this applause! - who was kidnapped two years ago in Niger. We also rejoice because three other hostages were released with him. We continue to pray for the missionaries and catechists and also for those who are persecuted or kidnapped in various parts of the world.

I wish to address a word of encouragement and support to the fishermen who have been held in Libya for more than a month, and to their families. Entrusting them to Mary Star of the Sea, may they keep alive the hope to be able to embrace their loved ones again soon. I pray also for the various discussions in progress at an international level, that they may be relevant for the future of Libya. Brothers and sisters, the time has come to stop every form of hostility, promoting the dialogue that leads to peace, to stability and to the unity of the country. Let us pray together for the fisherman and for Libya, in silence.

I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims from various countries. In particular, I greet and bless with affection the Peruvian community of Rome, gathered here with the venerated image of the *Señor de los Milagros*. A round of applause for the Peruvian community! I also greet the volunteers of the Italian Body for the Protection of Animals and Legality.

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