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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 afternoon!

On this Fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the Gospel proposes to us once again the account of the Annunciation. "Rejoice" says the angel to Mary, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (*Lk* 1:28, 31). It seems to be an announcement of pure joy, destined to make the Virgin happy. Among the women of that time, which woman did not dream of becoming the mother of the Messiah? But along with joy, those words foretell a great trial to Mary. Why? Because in that moment she was "betrothed" (*v.* 27); she was unmarried. She was betrothed to Joseph. In such a situation, the Law of Moses stipulated there should be no relations or cohabitation. Therefore, in having a son, Mary would have transgressed the Law, and the punishment for women was terrible: stoning (see *Dt* 22:20-21). Certainly the divine message would have filled Mary's heart with light and strength; nevertheless, she found herself faced with a crucial decision: to say "yes" to God, risking everything, even her life, or to decline the invitation and to continue her ordinary life.

What does she do? She responds thus: "Let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). But in the language in which the Gospel is written, it is not simply "let it be". The expression indicates a strong desire, it indicates the will that something happen. In other words, Mary does not say: "If it has to happen, let it happen..., if it cannot be otherwise...". It is not resignation. No, she does not express a weak and submissive acceptance, but rather she expresses a strong desire, a vivacious desire. She is not passive, but active. She does not submit to God, she binds herself to God. She is a woman in love prepared to serve her Lord completely and immediately. She could have asked for a little time to think about it, or even for more explanations about what would happen; perhaps

she could have set some conditions... Instead, she does not take time, she does not keep God waiting, she does not delay.

How often - let us think of ourselves now - how often is our life is made up of postponements, even the spiritual life! For example, I know it is good for me to pray, but today I do not have time ... tomorrow ... by saying "tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow", we postpone things: I will do it tomorrow. I know it is important to help someone, yes, I must do it: I will do it tomorrow. Today, on the threshold of Christmas, Mary invites us not to postpone, but to say "yes". "Must I pray!" "Yes, I will seek and pray". "Must I help others? Yes". How shall I do it? And I do it. Without putting it off. Every "yes" costs something, every "yes" has its cost, but it always costs less than what that courageous and prompt "yes" cost her, that "*let it be to me according to your word*", which brought us salvation.

What, then is the "yes" we can say? Instead of complaining in these difficult times about what the pandemic prevents us from doing, let us do something for someone who has less: not the umpteenth gift for ourselves and our friends, but for a person in need whom no-one thinks of! And another piece of advice: in order for Jesus to be born in us, let us prepare our hearts, let us go to pray, let us not let ourselves be swept up by consumerism. "Ah, I have to buy presents, I must do this and that". That frenzy of doing things, more and more. It is Jesus that is important. Consumerism is not found in the manger in Bethlehem: there is reality, poverty, love. Let us prepare our hearts to be like Mary's: free from evil, welcoming, ready to receive God.

"*Let it be to me according to your word*". This is the Virgin's last word for this last Sunday of Advent, and it is the invitation to take a genuine step towards Christmas. For if the birth of Jesus does not touch our lives - mine, yours, yours, ours, everyone's - if it does not touch our lives, it slips past us in vain. In the *Angelus* now, we too will say "*let your word be fulfilled in me*": May Our Lady help us to say it with our lives, with our approach to these last days in which to prepare ourselves well for Christmas.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, the coronavirus pandemic has caused particular distress to maritime workers. Many of them - an estimated 400,000 worldwide - are stranded on ships, beyond the terms of their contracts, and are unable to return home. I ask the Virgin Mary, Stella Maris, to comfort these people and all those in difficult situations, and I urge governments to do all they can to enable them to return to their loved ones.

This year the organisers had the good idea of holding the "100 Nativity Scenes" exhibition under the Colonnade. There are many Nativity displays which are really a catechesis of the faith of the people of God. I invite you to visit the Nativity scenes under the Colonnade, to understand how people try to show how Jesus was born through art. The cribs under the Colonnade are a great catechesis of our faith.

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims from various countries, families, parish groups, associations and individual faithful. May Christmas, now close at hand, be for each of us an occasion of inner renewal, of prayer, of conversion, of steps forward in faith and of fraternity among ourselves. Let us look around us, let us look especially at those who are in need: the brother who suffers, wherever he may be, is one of us. He is Jesus in the manger: the one who suffers is Jesus. Let us think a little about this. Let Christmas be closeness to Jesus, in this brother and sister. There, in the brother in need, is the Nativity to which we must go in solidarity. This is the living nativity scene: the nativity scene where we truly meet the Redeemer in the people in need. Let us therefore journey towards the holy night and await the fulfilment of the mystery of Salvation.

And I wish everyone a blessed Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me.

Enjoy your lunch, and goodbye!

