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

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Once again in the Square! Today's Gospel passage (cf. *Mk* 1:29-39) presents the healing, by Jesus, of Peter's mother-in-law and then of many other sick and suffering people who gather round him. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the first physical healing recounted by Mark: the woman is in bed with a fever; Jesus' attitude and gesture toward her are emblematic: "he came and took her by the hand" (v. 31), the Evangelist notes. There is so much tenderness in this simple act, which seems almost natural: "the fever left her; and she served them" (*ibid.*). Jesus' healing power meets no resistance; and the person healed resumes her normal life, immediately thinking of others and not of herself – and this is significant; it is the sign of true "health"!

That day was a sabbath day. The people of the village wait for sundown and then, the obligation of rest having ended, they go out and bring to Jesus all those who are sick and possessed by demons. And he heals them, but forbids the demons to reveal that he is the Christ (cf. vv. 32-34). Thus, from the very beginning, Jesus shows his predilection for people suffering in body and in spirit: it is a predilection of Jesus to draw near to people who suffer both in body and in spirit. It is the Father's predilection, which he incarnates and manifests with deeds and words. His disciples were eyewitnesses to this; they saw this and then witnessed to it. But Jesus did not want just spectators of his mission: he involved them; he sent them; he also gave them the power to heal the sick and cast out demons (cf. *Mt* 10:1; *Mk* 6:7). And this has continued without interruption in the life of the Church, up to today. And this is important. Taking care of the sick of every kind is not an "optional activity" for the Church, no! It is not something extra, no. Taking care of the sick of every kind is an integral part of the Church's

mission, as it was for Jesus'. And this mission is to bring God's tenderness to a suffering humanity. We will be reminded of this in a few days, on 11 February, with the World Day of the Sick.

The reality that we are experiencing throughout the world due to the pandemic makes this message, this essential mission of the Church, particularly relevant. The voice of Job, which echoes in today's liturgy, is once again the interpreter of our human condition, so lofty in dignity – our human condition, the loftiest in dignity - and at the same time so fragile. In the face of this reality, the question "why?" always arises in the heart.

And to this question Jesus, the Word Incarnate, responds not with an explanation – to this because we are so lofty in dignity and so fragile in condition, Jesus does not respond to this 'why' with an explanation -, but with a loving presence that bends down, that takes by the hand and lifts up, as he did with Peter's mother-in-law (cf. *Mk* 1:31). Bending down to lift up the other. Let us not forget that the only legitimate way to look at a person from top down is when you stretch out a hand to help them get up. The only one. And this is the mission that Jesus entrusted to the Church. The Son of God manifests his Lordship not "from top down", not from a distance, but in bending down, stretching out his hand; he manifests his Lordship in closeness, in tenderness, in compassion. Closeness, tenderness, compassion are the style of God. God draws near, and he draws near with tenderness and compassion. How many times in the Gospel do we read, before a health problem or any problem: "he had compassion". Jesus' compassion, God's closeness in Jesus is the style of God. Today's Gospel passage also reminds us that this compassion is deeply rooted in the intimate relationship with the Father. Why? Before daybreak and after sundown, Jesus withdrew and remained alone to pray (v. 35). From there he drew the strength to fulfil his mission, preaching and healing.

May the Holy Virgin help us to allow Jesus to heal us – we always need this, everyone – so that we might in our turn be witnesses to God's healing tenderness.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

In these days I am following with deep concern the developments of the situation that has come about in Myanmar, a country that, since the time of my Apostolic Visit in 2017, I have carried in my heart with so much affection. In this most delicate moment I wish to again assure my spiritual closeness, my prayer and my solidarity to the people of Myanmar. And I pray that those who hold responsibility in the country will place themselves with sincere willingness at the service of the common good, promoting social justice and national stability, for a harmonious coexistence. Let us pray for Myanmar. [*moment of silence*]

I would like to address an appeal in favour of unaccompanied migrant minors. There are so many! Sadly, among those who for various reasons are forced to leave their homeland, there are always dozens of children and young people alone, without their family and exposed to many dangers. In these days, I have learned of the dramatic situation of those who find themselves on the so-called "Balkan route". But there are some on all the "routes". Let us ensure that these fragile and defenseless creatures not lack proper care and preferential humanitarian channels.

Today in Italy we are celebrating the *Day for Life* on the theme "Freedom and life". I join the Italian bishops in recalling that freedom is the great gift that God has given us to seek and achieve our own good and that of others, beginning with the primary good of life. Our society is helped to heal from all attacks on life, so that it may be protected in all of its stages. And allow me to add one of my concerns: the Italian demographic winter. In Italy births have decreased and the future is in danger. Let us take up this concern and seek to ensure that this demographic winter ends and a new springtime of boys and girls thrives.

Tomorrow, the liturgical remembrance of Saint Josephine Bakhita, a Sudanese woman religious who was

familiar with the humiliations and sufferings of slavery, we celebrate the *Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking*. This year the aim is to work for an economy that does not favour, even indirectly, this ignoble trafficking, that is, an economy that never makes men and women commodities, objects, but always the aim. Service to men, to women, but not to use them as merchandise. Let us ask Saint Josephine Bakhita to help us with this.

And I offer my cordial greeting to all of you, people of Rome and pilgrims: I am happy to see you again gathered in the Square, even those *habitué*, the Spanish nuns here, who are always good; come rain or shine they are there! And also the young people of the Immaculate.... All of you. I am pleased. I wish everyone a happy Sunday. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch! *Arrivederci!*
