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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!*

The Square is beautiful with the sun! It's beautiful!

Today's Gospel (cf *Mk* 1:40-45) presents us with the encounter between Jesus and a man who was sick with leprosy. Lepers were considered impure and, according to the prescriptions of the Law, they had to remain outside of inhabited centres. They were excluded from every human, social and religious relationship: for example, they could not enter a synagogue, they could not go into the temple, these were religious restrictions. Jesus, instead, allows this man to draw near him, he is moved even to the point of extending his hand and touching him. This was unthinkable at that time. This is how he fulfills the Good News he proclaims: God draws near to our lives, he is moved to compassion because of the fate of wounded humanity and comes to break down every barrier that prevents us from being in relationship with him, with others and with ourselves. He drew near... Nearness. Compassion. The Gospel says that Jesus, seeing the leper, was moved with compassion, tenderness. Three words that indicate God's style: nearness, compassion, tenderness. In this episode, we can see two "transgressions" that intersect: the transgression of the leper who draws near to Jesus, and should not have done so; and Jesus who, moved with compassion, touches him compassionately to heal him. He should not have done that. Both of them are transgressors. There are two transgressions.

The first transgression is that of the leper: despite the prescriptions of the Law, he comes out of his isolation and goes to Jesus. His illness was considered a divine punishment, but, in Jesus, he is able to see another aspect of

God: not the God who punishes, but the Father of compassion and love who frees us from sin and never excludes us from his mercy. Thus, that man can emerge from his isolation because in Jesus he finds God who shares his pain. Jesus's behavior attracts him, pushes him to go out of himself and entrust Him with his painful story. And allow me a thought here for the many good priest confessors who have this behavior of attracting people, and many people who feel that they are nothing, who feel they are flat on the ground because of their sins, who with tenderness, with compassion... Good confessors who do not have a whip in their hands, but just welcome, listen and say that God is good and that God always forgives, that God does not get tired of forgiving. I ask all of you here today in the Square, to give a round of applause for these merciful confessors.

The second transgression is that of Jesus: even though the Law prohibited touching lepers, he is moved, extends his hand and touches him to cure him. Someone would have said: He sinned. He did something the law prohibits. He is a transgressor. It is true: He is a transgressor. He does not limit himself to words, but touches him. To touch with love means to establish a relationship, to enter into communion, to become involved in the life of another person even to the point of sharing their wounds. With that gesture, Jesus reveals that God, who is not indifferent, does not keep himself at a "safe distance". Rather, he draws near out of compassion and touches our life to heal it with tenderness. It is God's style: nearness, compassion and tenderness. God's transgression. He is a great transgressor in this sense.

Brothers and sisters, even in today's world, many of our brothers and sisters still suffer from this illness, from Hansen's disease, or from other illnesses and conditions that carry social stigmas with them. "This person is a sinner". Think a moment about when that woman entered the banquet and poured out that perfume on Jesus's feet... The others were saying: "But if he were a prophet he would know who this woman is: a sinner". Disdain. Instead, Jesus welcomes, rather, thanks her: "Your sins are forgiven". Jesus's tenderness. Social prejudices distance these people through words: "This person is impure, that person is a sinner, this person is a crook, that person..." Yes, at times it is true. But not to judge through prejudice. Each one of us might experience wounds, failure, suffering, selfishness that make us close ourselves off from God and others because sin closes us in on ourselves because of shame, because of humiliation, but God wants to open our heart. In the face of all this, Jesus announces to us that God is not an idea or an abstract doctrine but God is the One who "contaminates" himself with our human woundedness and is not afraid to come into contact with our wounds. "But, Father, what are you saying? That God contaminates himself?" I am not saying this, St Paul said it: he made himself to be sin. He who was not a sinner, who could not sin, made himself to be sin. Look at how God contaminated himself to draw near to us, to have compassion and to make us understand his tenderness. Closeness, compassion, and tenderness.

To respect the rules regarding good reputation and social mores, we often silence pain or we wear masks that camouflage it. To balance the calculations of our selfishness and the interior laws of our fears we do not get that involved with the sufferings of others. Instead, let us ask the Lord for the grace to live these two "transgressions", these two "transgressions" from today's Gospel: that of the leper, so that we might have the courage to emerge from our isolation and, instead of staying put and feeling sorry for ourselves or crying over our failings, complaining, and instead of this, let us go to Jesus just as we are; "Jesus I am like this". We will feel that embrace, that embrace of Jesus that is so beautiful. And then Jesus's transgression, a love that goes beyond conventions, that overcomes prejudices and the fear of getting involved with the lives of others. Let us learn to be transgressors like these two: like the leper and like Jesus.

May the Virgin Mary accompany us on this journey as we now invoke her in the prayer of the *Angelus*.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I always look with gratitude on the dedication of those who collaborate in favor of migrants. I thank all of you for what you do for migrants. Today in particular, I join the bishops of Colombia in expressing gratitude to the

Colombian authorities for implementing the temporary protection statute for Venezuelan migrants present in that country, fostering welcoming, protecting and integrating. It is not a super wealthy, developed country that is doing this... No: this is being done by a country that has many problems of development, of poverty and of peace... Almost 70 years of guerrilla war. But with this problem they have had the courage to look at those migrants and to create this statute. Thank you to Colombia. Thank you!

Today is the Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, evangelisers of the Slavic peoples, proclaimed by Saint John Paul II as Co-patrons of Europe. I affectionately greet all of the communities who live in the territories evangelised by the holy brothers. May their intercession help us find new ways to communicate the Gospel. These two were not afraid of finding new ways to communicate the Gospel. And through their intercession, may the Christian churches grow in their desire to walk toward full unity while respecting differences.

And I cannot fail today, Saint Valentine's Day, to extend a thought and greeting to engaged couples, to those who are in love. I accompany you with my prayer and I bless you all.

And now my greeting goes to you, the faithful of Rome and pilgrims. I also see people who are French, and Mexicans, Spaniards, Polish people. Welcome to you all! Many greetings!

We begin Lent this coming Wednesday. It will be a favourable time of giving a meaning of faith and hope to the crisis that we are living. And before, I do not want to forget: the three words that help us understand God's style. Do not forget: nearness, compassion, tenderness. Let's say them together: Nearness, compassion, tenderness.

I wish all of you a blessed Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your meal and arrivederci!

Thank you!
