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The Pope's words at the *Regina Caeli* prayer

At midday today, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the *Regina Caeli* 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 *Regina Caeli*

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Today, in Italy and in other countries, we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. The Gospel passage (Mk 16:15-20) – the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark – presents us the Risen One's final encounter with the disciples before he ascends to the right hand of the Father. Usually, as we know, farewell scenes are sad. They cause a feeling of loss, of abandonment in those who remain; instead, none of this happens to the disciples. Despite their separation from the Lord, they do not appear grief-stricken, but rather, they are joyful and ready to go out into the world as missionaries.

Why are the disciples not sad? Why should we too rejoice at seeing Jesus ascending into heaven? Because the Ascension completes Jesus' mission among us. Indeed, if it is for us that Jesus descended from heaven, it is also for us that he ascends there. After having descended into our humanity and redeeming it – God, the Son of God, descends and becomes man, takes our humanity and redeems it – he now ascends into heaven, taking our flesh with him. He is the first man who enters heaven, because Jesus is man, true man; he is God, true God; our flesh is in heaven and this gives us joy. Now at the right hand of the Father sits a human body, for the first time, the body of Jesus, and in this mystery each of us contemplates our own future destination. This is not at all an abandonment; Jesus remains forever with the disciples – with us. He remains in prayer, because he, as man, prays to the Father, and as God, man and God, shows Him his wounds, the wounds by which he has redeemed us. Jesus' prayer is there, with our flesh: he is one of us, God man, and he prays for us.

And this has to give us confidence, or rather joy, great joy! And the second reason for joy is Jesus' promise. He told us: "I will send you the Holy Spirit". And there, with the Holy Spirit, that commandment is made which he gives in his farewell: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel". And it will be the power of the Holy Spirit that leads us there into the world, to bring the Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit of that day, that Jesus promised, and then nine days later he will come in the Feast of Pentecost. It is precisely the Holy Spirit who made it possible for us to be this way today. A great joy! Jesus went to heaven: the first man before the Father.

He left with his wounds, which were the price of our salvation, and he prays for us. And then he sends us the Holy spirit; he promises us the Holy Spirit, to go to evangelize. This is the reason for the joy today; this is the reason for the joy on this day of the Ascension.

Brothers and sisters, on this Feast of the Ascension, while we contemplate Heaven, where Christ has ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father, let us ask Mary, Queen of Heaven, to help us be courageous witnesses to the Risen One in the world, in the concrete situations of life.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters! I am following with great concern what is happening in the Holy Land. In these days, violent armed clashes between the Gaza Strip and Israel have gained the upper hand, risk degenerating into a spiral of death and destruction. Many people have been injured and many innocent people have died. Among them are even children, and this is terrible and unacceptable. Their death is a sign that they do not want to build the future, but they want to destroy it.

Moreover, the growing hatred and violence that is involving various cities in Israel is a serious wound to fraternity and to peaceful coexistence among the citizens, which will be difficult to heal if we do not open immediately to dialogue. I wonder: where will hatred and vengeance lead? Do we really think we can build peace by destroying the other? "In the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters" (cf. Document on Human Fraternity) I make an appeal to calm and, to who is responsible for it, to put a stop to the din of weapons and to follow the paths of peace, even with the help of the International Community.

Let us pray constantly that the Israelis and Palestinians may find the path of dialogue and forgiveness, to be patient builders of peace and justice, opening up, step after step, to a common hope, to a coexistence among brothers and sisters.

Let us pray for the victims, in particular for the children; let us pray for peace to the Queen of Peace. Hail Mary....

Today "Laudato Si' Week" begins, to educate more and more to listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. I thank the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, *Caritas Internationalis* and the numerous member organizations, and I invite everyone to participate.

I greet the pilgrims from various nations who yesterday, here in Rome at Saint John Lateran, took part in Beatification of the priest, Francis Mary of the Cross, founder of the men and women Salvatorian religious. He was a tireless proclaimer of the Gospel, using every means that Christ's charity inspired in him. May his apostolic zeal be an example and guide to those in the Church who are called to take the word and love of Jesus into every environment. A round of applause for the new Blessed! The icon is here in front....

I cordially greet you all, those from Rome, from Italy and from other countries, particularly the AGESCI-Lupetti Group from the Saint Gregory the Great parish in Rome; and the *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary of the Diocese of Florence.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday, also the youth of the Immacolata, who are good. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*
