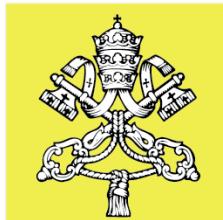


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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

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 Gospel of today's liturgy, the First Sunday of Advent, speaks to us about the Lord's coming at the end of time. Jesus announces bleak and distressing events, but precisely at this point He invites us not to be afraid. Why? Because everything will be okay? No, but because *He will come*. Jesus will return as He promised. This is what he says: "Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand" (*Lk 21:28*). It is nice to hear this encouraging Word: stand up straight and raise our heads because right during those moments when everything seems to be coming to an end, the Lord comes to save us. We await Him with joy, even in the midst of tribulations, during life's crises and the dramatic events of history. We await Him.

But how do we raise our heads and not become absorbed with difficulties, suffering and defeat? Jesus points the way with a strong reminder: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy... Be vigilant at all times and pray" (*Lk 21:34, 36*).

"Be vigilant": *vigilance*. Let us focus on this important aspect of the Christian life. From the words of Christ, we see that vigilance is tied to alertness: be alert, do not get distracted, that is, stay awake! Vigilance means this: not to allow our hearts to become lazy or our spiritual life to soften into mediocrity. Be careful because we can become "sleepy Christians" – and we know there are many Christians who are asleep, who are anesthetized by spiritual worldliness - Christians without spiritual fervor, without intensity in prayer, without enthusiasm for mission, without passion for the Gospel; Christians who always look inwards, incapable of looking to the horizon.

And this leads to “dozing off”: to move things along by inertia, to fall into apathy, indifferent to everything except what is comfortable for us. This is a sad life going forward this way since there is no happiness.

We need to be vigilant so that our daily life does not become routine, and, as Jesus says, so we are not burdened by life’s anxieties (cf. v. 34). So today is a good moment to ask ourselves: what weighs on my heart? What weighs on my spirit? What makes me go to sit in the lazy chair? It is sad to see Christians “in the armchair”! What are the mediocrities that paralyze me, the vices that crush me to the ground and prevent me from raising my head? And regarding the burdens that weigh on the shoulders of our brothers and sisters, am I aware of them or indifferent to them? These are good questions to ask ourselves, because they help *guard our hearts against apathy*. What then is apathy? It is a great enemy of the spiritual life and also of Christian life. Apathy is a type of laziness that makes us slide into sadness, it takes away zest for life and the will to do things. It is a negative spirit that traps the soul in apathy, robbing it of its joy. It starts with sadness sliding downwards so that there is no joy. The Book of Proverbs says: “With all vigilance guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life” (*Prov 4:23*). Guard your heart: that means to be vigilant! Stay awake and guard your heart.

And let us add an essential ingredient: the secret to being vigilant is *prayer*. In fact, Jesus says: “Be vigilant at all times and pray” (*Lk 21:36*). Prayer is what keeps the lamp of the heart lit. This is especially true when we feel that our enthusiasm has cooled down. Prayer re-lights it, because it brings us back to God, to the center of things. Prayer reawakens the soul from sleep and focuses it on what matters, on the purpose of existence. Even during our busiest days, we must not neglect prayer. The prayer of the heart can be helpful for us, repeating often brief invocations. For example, during Advent, we could make a habit of saying, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Only these words, but repeating them: “Come, Lord Jesus”. This time of preparation leading to Christmas is beautiful: we think of the nativity scene and Christmas, so let us say from the heart: “Come, Lord Jesus”. Let us repeat this prayer all throughout the day: the soul will remain vigilant! “Come, Lord Jesus”, is a prayer we can all say together three times. “Come, Lord Jesus”, “Come, Lord Jesus”, “Come, Lord Jesus”.

And now we pray to the Madonna: may she who awaited the Lord with a vigilant heart accompany us during our Advent journey.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters

Yesterday I met members of associations, groups of migrants, and people who share their journey with a spirit of fraternity. They are here in the Square with that large banner! Welcome! But how very many migrants are exposed, even during these days, to great dangers, and how many lose their lives at our borders! I feel sorrow hearing the news about the situation in which so many of them find themselves. I think of those who died crossing the English Channel, those on the borders of Belarus, many of whom are children, and those who drown in the Mediterranean. There is so much sorrow when thinking about them. Of those who are repatriated to North Africa, they are captured by traffickers who turn them into slaves: they sell the women and torture the men... I think of those who, also this week, have tried to cross the Mediterranean seeking a better land and find instead their grave there; and so many others. I assure my prayers to the migrants who find themselves in these crisis situations. Know also that from my heart I am always close to you, in prayer and action. I thank all the institutions both of the Catholic Church and elsewhere, especially the national Caritas agencies and all those who are committed to alleviating their suffering. I renew my heartfelt appeal to those who can contribute to the resolution of these problems, especially civil and military authorities, so that understanding and dialogue may finally prevail over any kind of instrumentalization and guide the will and efforts towards solutions that respect the humanity of these people. Let us remember migrants, their suffering, and let us pray together in silence... (moment of silence).

I greet all of you pilgrims who have come from Italy and various countries; I see the many flags of various nations. I greet the families, parish groups, and associations. In particular, I greet the faithful from East Timor - I

see the flag there - from Poland and from Lisbon; as well as those from Tivoli.

I wish everyone a good Sunday, a good Advent journey, and a good journey towards Christmas, towards the Lord. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a nice lunch, and *arrivederci!*
