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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 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 for today's Liturgy, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, brings us into the house of Nazareth, where she receives the angel's annunciation (cf. *Lk* 1:26-38). Within the domestic walls, a person reveals him or herself better than elsewhere. And it is precisely within that domestic intimacy that the Gospel gives us a detail that reveals the beauty of Mary's heart.

The angel calls her "full of grace". If she is full of grace, it means the Madonna is void of evil: she is without sin, Immaculate. Now, at the angel's greeting, Mary – the text says – is "greatly troubled" (*Lk* 1:29). She is not only surprised, but troubled. To receive grand greetings, honours and compliments sometimes brings the risk of provoking pride and presumption. Let us recall that Jesus is not gentle with those who go in search of greetings in the squares, adulation, visibility (cf. *Lk* 20:46). Mary, instead, does not exalt herself, but is troubled; rather than feeling pleased, she feels amazement. The angel's greeting seemed too grand for her. Why? Because she feels her littleness within, and that littleness, that humility attracts God's eyes.

Within the walls of the house of Nazareth, we thus see a marvellous characteristic of Mary's heart. How is Mary's heart? Having received the highest of compliments, she is troubled she because she hears addressed to her what she has not attributed to herself. In fact, Mary does not credit prerogatives to herself, she does not hold claim to anything, she accounts nothing to her own merit. She is not self-satisfied, she does not exalt herself. For

in her humility, she knows she receives everything from God. Therefore, *free from herself*, she is completely directed toward God and others. Mary Immaculate *does not look on herself*. This is true humility: not looking on oneself, but looking toward God and others.

Let us remember that this perfection of Mary, the full of grace, is declared by the angel within the walls of her house – not in Nazareth’s main square, but there, in hiding, in the greatest humility. In that little house of Nazareth beat the greatest heart that any creature has ever had. Dear brothers and sisters, this is extraordinary news for us! Because the Lord is telling us that to work marvellous deeds, he has no need of grand means and our lofty abilities, but our humility, eyes open to Him, and also open to others. With this annunciation, within the poor walls of a small house, God changed history. Even today, he wants to do great things with us in our daily lives: in our families, at work, in everyday environments. God’s grace loves to operate there more than in great historical events. But, I ask myself, do we believe this? Or rather do we think that holiness is a utopia, something for insiders, a pious illusion incompatible with ordinary life?

Let us ask the Madonna for a grace: that she free us from the misleading idea that the Gospel is one thing and life is another; that she enkindle enthusiasm in us for the ideal of sanctity which has nothing to do with holy cards and pictures, but is about living *humbly and joyfully*, like the Madonna, what happens each day, freed from ourselves, with our eyes fixed on God and the neighbour we meet. Let’s not lose heart: The Lord has given everyone the stuff it takes to weave holiness within our everyday life! And when we are assailed by the doubt that we cannot succeed, the sadness of not being adequate, let us allow the Madonna to look on us with her “eyes of mercy”, for no one who asked for her help has ever been abandoned!

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Two days ago I returned from my journey in Cyprus and Greece. I thank the Lord for this pilgrimage; I thank all of you for the prayer that accompanied me, and the populations of those two dear countries, along with their civil and religious leaders, for the affection and kindness with which they welcomed me. To all of you, I say again: thank you!

Cyprus is a *pearl in the Mediterranean*, a pearl of rare beauty, which however bears the wound of barbed wire, the suffering of a wall that divides her. In Cyprus I felt at home; I found brothers and sisters in everyone. I hold in my heart every encounter, in particular the Mass in the stadium of Nicosia. I was moved by the dear Orthodox Brother Chrysostomos, when he spoke to me about the *Mother Church*: as Christians we follow different paths, but we are children of the Church of Jesus, that is a Mother, and accompanies and keeps us, that keeps us going, all as brothers and sisters. My hope for Cyprus is that it may always be a laboratory of brotherhood, where encounter prevails over confrontation, where we welcome our brother and sister, especially when he or she is poor, discarded, a migrant. I repeat that, faced with history, before the faces of those who emigrate, we cannot remain silent, we cannot turn away.

In Cyprus, as in Lesbos, I was able to look into the eyes of this suffering: please, let us look into the eyes of the discarded people we meet, let us be provoked by the faces of children, children of desperate migrants. Let us allow ourselves to be moved by their suffering in order to react to our indifference; let us look at their faces, to awaken us from the slumber of habit!

Then I think with gratitude of Greece. There too I received a fraternal welcome. In Athens I felt immersed in the greatness of history, in the memory of Europe: humanism, democracy, wisdom, faith. There too I experienced the mystique of wholeness: in the meeting with my brother Bishops and the Catholic community, in the festive Mass celebrated on the Lord's Day, and then with the young people who had come from so many places, some from very far away, to live and share the joy of the Gospel. And again, I experienced the gift of embracing dear the Orthodox Archbishop Hieronymos: first he welcomed me into his home and the next day he came to visit me.

I cherish this fraternity in my heart. I entrust to the Holy Mother of God the many seeds of encounter and hope that the Lord has scattered on this pilgrimage. I ask you to continue to pray that they may germinate in patience and flourish in trust.

Today marks the end of the Year dedicated to Saint Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. And the day after tomorrow, 10 December, the Jubilee of Loreto will come to a close. May the grace of these events continue to work in our lives and in the lives of our communities. May the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph guide us on the path to holiness!

And I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims! A special wish for Italian Catholic Action: may it be a gymnasium of synodality in the dioceses and parishes. I greet the children of the "Milleunavoce" Choir, the faithful of Zaragoza and the young people of Valdemoro, diocese of Getafe, Spain - the Spanish are making themselves heard, all right! -As well as the delegation from the Municipality of Rocca di Papa, with the torch that will light the Christmas Star on the Fortress of the town. I greet the group of Mexicans from the State of Puebla.

And I wish you all a happy feast day, especially you children of the *Immacolata*, it is your feast! Please do not forget to pray for me, and I will for you. Enjoy your meal and *arrivederci*.
