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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*!

Today's Liturgy offers us a beautiful phrase, that we always pray in the *Angelus* and which by itself reveals to us the meaning of Christmas. It says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1:14). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. These words, if we think about it, contain a paradox. They bring together two opposites: the *Word* and the *flesh*. "Word" indicates that Jesus is the eternal Word of the Father, infinite, existing from all time, before all created things; "flesh", on the other hand, indicates precisely our created reality, fragile, limited, mortal. Before Jesus there were two separate worlds: Heaven opposed to earth, the infinite opposed to the finite, spirit opposed to matter. And there is another opposition in the Prologue of the Gospel of John, another binomial: *word* and *flesh* are a binomial; the other binomial is *light* and *darkness* (cf. v. 5). Jesus is the light of God who has entered into the darkness of the world. *Light* and *darkness*. God is light: in him there is no opacity; in us, on the other hand, there is much darkness. Now, with Jesus, light and darkness meet: holiness and sin, grace and sin. Jesus, the incarnation of Jesus is the very place of the encounter, the encounter between God and humanity, the encounter between grace and sin.

What does the Gospel intend to announce with these polarities? Something splendid: God's way of acting. Faced with our frailties, the Lord does not withdraw. He does not remain in his blessed eternity and in his infinite light, but rather he draws close, he makes himself incarnate, he descends into the darkness, he dwells in lands that are foreign to him. And why does God do this? Why does he come down to us? He does this because he does not resign himself to the fact that we can go astray by going far from him, far from eternity, far from the

light. This is God's work: *to come among us*. If we consider ourselves unworthy, that does not stop him: he comes. If we reject him, He does not tire of seeking us out. If we are not ready and willing to receive him, he prefers to come anyway. And if we close the door in his face, he waits. He is truly the Good Shepherd. And the most beautiful image of the Good Shepherd? The Word that becomes flesh to share in our life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes to seek us right where we are: in our problems, in our suffering… He comes there.

Dear brothers and sisters, often we keep our distance from God because we think we are not worthy of him for other reasons. And it is true. But Christmas invites us to see things *from his point of view*. God wishes to be incarnate. If your heart seems too contaminated by evil, if it seems disordered, please, do not close yourself up, do not be afraid: he will come. Think of the stable in Bethlehem. Jesus was born there, in that poverty, to tell us that he is certainly not afraid of visiting your heart, of dwelling in a shabby life. And this is the word: to *dwell*. To *dwell* is the verb used in today's Gospel to signify this reality: it expresses a total sharing, a great intimacy. And this is what God wants: he wants to dwell *with* us, he wants to dwell *in* us, not to remain distant.

And I ask myself, you, all of us: what about us, do we want to make space for him? In words yes, no-one will say, "I don't!"; yes. But in practice? Perhaps there are aspects of life we keep to ourselves, that are exclusive, or inner spaces that we are afraid the Gospel will enter into, where we do not want God to be involved. Today I invite you to be specific. What are the inner things that I believe God does not like? What is the space that I believe is only for me, where I do not want God to come? Let each of us be specific, and answer this. "Yes, yes, I would like Jesus to come, but this, he mustn't touch it; and this, no, and this...". Everyone has their own sin - let us call it by name. And He is not afraid of our sins: He came to heal us. Let us at least let Him see it, let Him see the sin. Let us be brave, let us say: "But, Lord, I am in this situation but I do not want to change. But you, please, don't go too far away". That's a good prayer. Let's be sincere today.

In these days of Christmas, it will do us good to welcome the Lord precisely there. How? For example, by stopping in front of the Nativity scene, because it shows Jesus who came to dwell in all our real, ordinary life, where not everything goes well, where there are many problems: we are to blame for some of them; others are the fault of other people. And Jesus comes: the shepherds who work hard, we see the shepherds there, Herod who threatens the innocent, great poverty… But in the midst of all this, in the midst of so many problems – and even in the midst of our problems – there is God, there is God who wants to dwell with us. And he waits for us to present to him our situations, what we are living. So, before the Nativity, let us talk to Jesus about our real situations. *Let us invite him officially into our lives*, especially in the dark areas: "Look, Lord, there is no light there, the electricity doesn't reach there, but please don't touch, because I don't feel like leaving this situation". Speak clearly and plainly. The dark areas, our "inner stables"; each one of us has them. And let us also tell him, without fear, about the social problems, and the ecclesial problems of our time, even personal problems, even the worst, because God loves to dwell: in our stable.

May the Mother of God, in whom the Word was made flesh, help us to cultivate greater intimacy with the Lord.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I address my heartfelt greeting to you all, faithful of Rome and pilgrims from Italy and from other countries: I see Polish, Brazilian, Uruguayan, Argentine, Paraguayan, Colombian, and Venezuelan flags: welcome to you all! I greet the families, associations, and parish groups, especially those of Postioma and Porcellengo, in the diocese of Treviso, as well as the teenagers of the *Regnum Christi* Federation and the young people of *Mary Immaculate*.

On this first Sunday of the year, I renew to you all the Lord's blessings of peace and good. In joyful moments and in sad ones, let us entrust ourselves to him, he who is our strength and our hope. And do not forget: let us invite the Lord to come within us, to come to our real life, ugly as it may be, as if it were a stable: "But, well, Lord,

I would not like you to enter, but look, and stay close". Let's do this.

I wish you all a blessed Sunday, and enjoy your lunch. And do not forget to pray for me. *Arrivederci*!