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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!*

In the Gospel of today's Liturgy, Jesus gives some basic life guidance to the disciples. The Lord refers to the most difficult situations, those that constitute the litmus test for us, those that confront us with those who are enemies and hostile to us, those who are always trying to do us harm. In such cases, the disciple of Jesus is called not to give in to instinct and hatred, but to go further, much further. To go beyond instinct, to go beyond hatred. Jesus says: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (*Lk 6:27*). And even more concretely: "To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also" (v. 29). When we hear this, it seems that the Lord is asking the impossible. And then, why love your enemies? If you do not react to the bullies, every abuse of power is given free rein, and this is not right. But is it really so? Does the Lord really ask *impossible* and indeed even *unjust* things of us? Is it so?

Let us consider first and foremost that sense of *injustice* that we feel in "turning the other cheek". And let us think of Jesus. During the passion, in his unjust trial before the high priest, at one point he receives a slap from one of the guards. And how does He react? He does not insult him, no: he says to the guard, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (*Jn 18:23*). He asks for an account of the wrong done to him. Turning the other cheek does not mean suffering in silence, giving in to injustice. Jesus, with his question, denounces what is unjust. But he does so without anger, without violence, indeed *with kindness*. He does not wish to spark off an argument, but rather to defuse resentment, this is important: to extinguish hatred and injustice together, seeking to restore the guilty brother. This is not easy, but Jesus did it and he tells us to do likewise. This is turning the other cheek: Jesus' mildness is a stronger response to the slap he received. Turning the other cheek is not the withdrawal of the loser, but the action of one who has

a greater inner strength. Turning the other cheek means defeating evil with the goodness that opens up a breach in the heart of the enemy, unmasking the absurdity of his hatred. And this attitude, this turning the other cheek, is dictated not by calculation or by hatred, but by love. Dear brothers and sisters, it is the freely given, undeserved love we receive from Jesus that generates in the heart a way of doing things that is similar to his, that rejects all vengeance. We are accustomed to revenge: “You did this to me, I will do that to you”, or to bearing a grudge in our heart, resentment that harms, destroys the person.

Let us come to another objection: it is possible for a person to come to love his or her enemies? If it depended only on us, it would be impossible. But let us recall that, when the Lord asks for something, he wishes to give it. The Lord never asks for something he has not already given us first. When he tells me to love my enemies, he wants to give me the capacity to do so. Without that ability, we would not be capable, but he tells you to “love your enemy” and gives you the capacity to love. Saint Augustine prayed in this way – listen to this beautiful prayer: Lord, “give what you command, and command what you will” (*Confessions*, X, 29.40), because you have already given it to me. What should we ask of him? What is God happy to give us? The strength to love, which is not a thing, but rather the Holy Spirit. The strength to love is the Holy Spirit, and with the Spirit of Jesus, we can respond to evil with good, we can love those who do us harm. This is what Christians do. How sad it is, when people and populations proud to be Christians see others as enemies and think to wage war against each other! It is very sad.

And us, shall we try to live following Jesus’ invitations? Think of someone who has wronged us. Each one of you, think of a person. It is common for us to be hurt by someone; think of that person. Perhaps we hold a grudge within. So, let us set alongside this resentment the image of Jesus, meek, during the trial, after the slap. And then let us ask the Holy Spirit to act in our heart. Finally, let us pray for that person: let us pray for those who have done us harm (see *Lk 6:28*). When people harm us, we immediately go and tell others and we feel we are victims. Let us stop, and pray to the Lord for that person, that he might help him or her, and so this feeling of resentment will be dispelled. Praying for those who have wronged us is the first step to transforming evil into good. Prayer. May the Virgin Mary help us be workers of peace towards everyone, especially those who are hostile to us and whom we do not like.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

I express my closeness to the populations stricken in recent days by natural disasters. I think in particular of the south-east of Madagascar, ravaged by a series of cyclones, and the area of Petropolis in Brazil, devastated by floods and landslides. May the Lord receive the victims in his peace, console their relatives and support those who come to their aid.

Today it is the National Day for healthcare professionals, and we must remember the many doctors, nurses, and volunteers who stay by the side of the sick, who care for them, who make them feel better, who help them. “No-one is saved alone”, said the title of the programme “*A Sua Immagine*”. No-one is saved alone. And in sickness, we need someone who saves us, who assists us. A doctor told me, this morning, that in the time of Covid, a person was dying, and said to him, “Hold my hand: I am dying, and I need your hand”. The heroic healthcare professionals showed this heroism in the time of Covid, but the heroism remains there every day. A round of applause and a big “thank you” to our doctors, nurses, and volunteers!

I warmly greet you all, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and various countries.

In particular, I greet the faithful of Madrid, Segovia, Burgos and Valladolid, in Spain – so many Spanish people! – as well as those from the parish of *Santa Francesca Cabrini* in Rome and the students of the Institute of the Sacred Heart in Barletta.

I greet and encourage the "Progetto Arca" group, which in recent days has inaugurated its social activity in Rome, in aid of the homeless. And I greet the young people of the *Immacolata*, how good you are!

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