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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, happy Sunday, *buongiorno!*

The Gospel for this Sunday's Liturgy recounts the so-called Parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). It leads us to God's heart who always forgives compassionately and tenderly. Always, God always forgives. We are the ones who get tired of asking for forgiveness, but he always forgives. It [the parable] tells us that God is a Father who not only welcomes us back, but rejoices and throws a feast for his son who has returned home after having squandered all his possessions. We are that son, and it is moving to think about how much the Father always loves us and waits for us.

But there is also the older son in the same parable who goes into a crisis in front of this Father. It can put us into crisis as well. In fact, this older son is also within us and, we are tempted to take his side, at least in part: he had always done his duty, he had not left home, and so he becomes indignant on seeing the Father embracing his son again after having behaved so badly. He protests and says: "I have served you for so many years and never disobeyed your command". Instead, for "this son of yours", you go so far as to celebrate! (cf. vv. 29-30) "I don't understand you!" This is the indignation of the older son.

These words illustrate the older son's problem. He bases his relationship with his Father solely on pure observance of *commands*, on a sense of duty. This could also be our problem, the problem among ourselves and with God: to lose sight that he is a Father and to live a distant religion, composed of prohibitions and duties.

And the consequence of this distance is rigidity towards our neighbour whom we no longer see as a brother or sister. In fact, in the parable, the older son does not say *my brother* to the Father. No, he says *that son of yours*, as if to say, “he is not my brother”. In the end, he risks remaining outside of the house. In fact, the text says: “he refused to go in” (v. 28), because the other one was there.

Seeing this, the Father goes out to plead with him: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (v. 31). He tries to make him understand that for him, every child is all of his life. The ones who know this well are parents, who are very close to feeling like God does. Something a father says in a novel is very beautiful: “When I became a father, I understood God” (H. de Balzac, *Il padre Goriot*, Milano 2004, 112). At this point in the parable, the Father opens his heart to his older son and expresses two needs, which are not commands, but essentials for his heart: “It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive” (v. 32). Let us see if we too have in our hearts these two things the Father needs: *to make merry and rejoice*.

First of all, *to make merry*, that is, to demonstrate that we are near to those who repent or who are on the way, to those who are in crisis or who are far away. Why should we do this? Because this helps to overcome the fear and discouragement that can come from remembering one’s sins. Those who have made mistakes often feel reproached in their own hearts. Distance, indifference and harsh words do not help. Therefore, like the Father, it is necessary to offer them a warm welcome that encourages them to go ahead. “But father, he did so many things”: warm welcome. And we, do we do this? Do we look for those who are far away? Do we want to celebrate with them? How much good an open heart, true listening, a transparent smile can do; to celebrate, not to make them feel uncomfortable! The Father could have said: “Okay, son, go back home, go back to work, go to your room, establish yourself and your work! And this would have been a good way to forgive. But no! God does not know how to forgive without celebrating! And the Father celebrates because of the joy he has because his son has returned.

And then, like the Father, we need to *rejoice*. When someone whose heart is synchronized with God’s sees the repentance of a person, they rejoice, no matter how serious their mistakes may have been. Do not stay focused on errors, do not point fingers at what they have done wrong, but rejoice over the good because another person’s good is mine as well! And we, do we know how to rejoice for others?

I would like to recount an imaginary story, but one that helps illustrate the heart of the father. There was a pop theatrical, three or four years ago, about the prodigal son, with the entire story. And at the end, when that son decides to return to his father, he talks about it with a friend and says: “I’m afraid my father will reject me, that he won’t forgive me!” And the friend advised him: “Send a letter to your father and tell him, ‘Father, I have repented, I want to come back home, but I’m not sure that will be happy. If you want to welcome me, please put a white handkerchief in the window’. And then he began his journey. And when he was near home, where the last curve in the road was, he was in front of the house. And what did he see? Not one handkerchief: it was full of white handkerchiefs, the windows, everywhere! The Father welcomes like this, totally, joyfully. This is our Father!

May the Virgin Mary teach us how to receive God’s mercy so that it might become the light by which we see our neighbours.

### After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

More than a month has gone by since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, of the beginning of this cruel and senseless war, that, like every war, represents a defeat for everyone, for everyone of us. We need to reject war, a place of death where fathers and mothers bury their children, where men kill their brothers and sisters without even having seen them, where the powerful decide and the poor die.

War does not devastate the present only, but the future of a society as well. I read that from the beginning of the aggression in Ukraine, one of every two children has been displaced from their country. This means destroying the future, causing dramatic trauma in the smallest and most innocent among us. This is the bestiality of war – a barbarous and sacrilegious act!

War should not be something that is inevitable. We should not accustom ourselves to war. Instead, we need to convert today's anger into a commitment for tomorrow, because if, after what is happening, we remain like we were before, we will all be guilty in some way. Before the danger of self-destruction, may humanity understand that the moment has come to abolish war, to erase it from human history before it erases human history.

I beg every political leader to reflect on this, to dedicate themselves to this! And, looking on battered Ukraine to understand how each day of war worsens the situation for everyone. Therefore, I renew my appeal: Enough. Stop it. Silence the weapons. Move seriously toward peace. Let us continue to pray untiringly to the Queen of Peace, to whom we consecrated humanity, in particular Russia and Ukraine, with such a huge and intense participation for which I thank all of you. Let us pray together. Hail Mary....

I greet all of you from Rome and pilgrims from Italy and from various countries. In particular, I greet the members of the faithful from Mexico, Madrid and Lyon; the students from Pamplona and Huelva, and young people from various countries who participated in formation in Loppiano. I greet the parishioners of Our Lady of in Roma, and those from Saint George in Bosco, Bassano del Grappa and Gela; the Confirmation candidates from Frascati and the "Friends of Zacchaeus" groups from Reggio Emilia; as well as the Commission promoting the Perugia-Assisi March for Peace and Fraternity who have come with a group of schoolchildren to renew their commitment to peace.

I greet those participating in the Rome Marathon. This year, through an initiative of Vatican Athletes, a number of athletes are involved in an initiative of solidarity with people who are in need in the city. Congratulations to you!

Precisely two years ago, in this piazza, we lifted up our plea for the end of the pandemic. Today, we have done so for an end to the war in Ukraine. At the Square's entrances, you will be given a book as a gift, produced by the Vatican Covid-19 Commission with the Dicastery for Communication. It is an invitation to pray without fear during moments of difficulty, always having faith in the Lord.

I hope all of you have a good Sunday and, please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch and *arrivederci*.

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