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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli prayer

At midday today, Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Regina Caeli 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 Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters, *Buongiorno!*

Today, the last day of the Octave of Easter, the Gospel recounts the first and second apparition of the Risen One to the disciples. Jesus comes at Passover, while the Apostles are shut in the Upper Room, out of fear, but since Thomas, one of the Twelve, is not present, Jesus returns eight days later (cf. *Jn* 20:19-29). Let's focus on the two main characters, Thomas and Jesus, looking first at the disciple, and then at the Master. There is a good dialogue between these two.

The Apostle Thomas, first of all. He represents all of us, who were not present in the Upper Room when the Lord appeared, and did not have other physical signs or apparitions from him. We too struggle at times like that disciple: how can we believe that Jesus is risen, that he accompanies us and is the Lord of our life without having seen him, without having touched him? How can one believe in this? Why does the Lord not give us some clearer sign of his presence and love? Some sign that I can see better... Here, we too are like Thomas, with the same doubts, the same reasoning.

But we do not need to be ashamed of this. By telling us the story of Thomas, in fact, the Gospel tells us that the Lord is not looking for perfect Christians. The Lord is not looking for perfect Christians. I tell you: I am afraid when I see a Christian, some associations of Christians who believe themselves to be perfect. The Lord is not looking for perfect Christians; the Lord is not looking for Christians who never doubt and always flaunt a

steadfast faith. When a Christian is like that, something isn't right. No, the adventure of faith, as for Thomas, consists of lights and shadows. Otherwise, what kind of faith would that be? It knows times of comfort, zeal and enthusiasm, but also of weariness, confusion, doubt and darkness. The Gospel shows us Thomas' "crisis" to tell us that we should not fear the crises of life and faith. Crises are not sins, they are part of the journey, we should not fear them. Many times, they make us humble because they strip us of the idea that we are fine, that we are better than others. Crises help us to recognize that we are needy: they rekindle the need for God and thus enable us to return to the Lord, to touch his wounds, to experience his love anew as if it were the first time. Dear brothers and sisters, is better to have an imperfect but humble faith that always returns to Jesus, than a strong but presumptuous faith that makes us proud and arrogant. Woe to those, woe to them!

And, faced with Thomas' absence and his journey, which is often also our own, what does Jesus do? The Gospel says twice that he "came" (vv. 19, 26). First once, then a second time, eight days later. Jesus does not give up, he does not get tired of us, he is not afraid of our crises, our weaknesses. He always comes back: when the doors are closed, he comes back; when we are in doubt, he comes back; when, like Thomas, we need to encounter him and to touch him up close, he comes back. Jesus always comes back, he always knocks on the door, and he does not come back with powerful signs that would make us feel small and inadequate, even ashamed, but with his wounds; he comes back showing us his wounds, signs of his love that has espoused our frailties.

Brothers and sisters, especially when we experience moments of weariness and crisis, the Risen Jesus wishes to return to stay with us. He only waits for us to seek him, to call on him, or even, like Thomas, to protest, bringing him our needs and our unbelief. He always comes back. Why? Because he is patient and merciful. He comes to open the upper rooms of our fears and unbelief because he always wants to give us another chance. Jesus is the Lord of "other chances": he always gives us another one, always. So let us think about the last time – let's try to remember a little – that, during a difficult moment or a period of crisis, we closed in on ourselves, barricading ourselves in our problems and shutting Jesus out of the house. And let us promise ourselves, the next time, in our fatigue, to seek Jesus, to return to him, to his forgiveness – he always forgives, always! – to return to those wounds that have healed us. In this way, we will also become capable of compassion, of approaching the wounds of others without inflexibility and without prejudice.

May Our Lady, Mother of Mercy – I like to think of her as the Mother of Mercy on the Monday after Mercy Sunday – accompany us on the journey of faith and love.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today various Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, and several Latin communities, celebrate Easter according to the Julian calendar. We celebrated it last Sunday, following the Gregorian calendar. I offer them my warmest wishes: Christ is risen, he is truly risen! May he fill with hope the good expectations of hearts. May he grant peace, outraged by the barbarity of war. Today marks two months since the beginning of this war: instead of stopping, the war has worsened. It is sad that in these days, which are the holiest and most solemn for all Christians, the deadly roar of weapons is heard rather than the sound of bells announcing the Resurrection; and it is sad that weapons are increasingly taking the place of words.

I renew my appeal for an Easter truce, a minimal and tangible sign of a desire for peace. The attack must be stopped, to respond to the suffering of the exhausted population; it must stop, in obedience to the words of the Risen Lord, who on Easter Day repeats to his disciples: "Peace be with you!" (*Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19.21*). I ask everyone to increase prayer for peace and to have the courage to say, to show that peace is possible. Political leaders, please, listen to the voice of the people, who want peace, not an escalation of the conflict.

In this regard, I greet and thank the participants in the special Perugia-Assisi march for peace and fraternity,

taking place today, as well as those who have joined in with similar events in other cities throughout Italy.

Today the bishops of Cameroon are making a national pilgrimage, with their faithful, to the Marian shrine of Marianberg, to reconsecrate the country to the Mother of God and to place it under her protection. I pray in particular for the return of peace to their country, which has been ravaged by violence in various regions for more than five years. Let us too raise our prayer, along with our brothers and sisters of Cameroon, that God may soon, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, grant true and lasting peace to this beloved country.

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and from many other countries. In particular, I greet the Polish, with a thought for their compatriots who are celebrating the "Day of Good" promoted by Caritas, and also for the victims of accidents in mines. I greet the faithful of Milan, Faenza, Verolanuova, Nembro and the volunteers of the Order of Malta from Vicenza. A special greeting goes to the pilgrimage of young Confirmation candidates from the diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, accompanied by their bishop, as well as the Confirmation candidates from Mondovì, Almenno San Salvatore, Albegno, Cazzago San Martino and Alta Padovana, and also to the group from Sant'Angelo Lodigiano and the altar boys from Spirano. I greet the devotees of Divine Mercy gathered here today in the church-sanctuary of Santo Spirito in Sassia; and the participants in the journey from the Sacra di San Michele to Monte Sant'Angelo.

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