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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* and happy feast day!

The Gospel of today's Solemnity introduces us into the home of Mary to recount the Annunciation (cf. *Lk* 1:26-38). The angel Gabriel greets the Virgin like this: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (v. 28). He does not call her by her name, Mary, but with a new name, that she did not know: *full of grace*. Full of grace, and therefore free from sin, is the name God gives her and that we celebrate today.

But let us think of Mary's wonder: only then did she discover her truest identity. Indeed, by calling her by that name, God reveals her greatest secret to her, which was previously unknown to her. Something similar can also happen to us. In what sense? In the sense that we sinners have also received an initial gift that has filled our lives, a good greater than anything else: we have received an *original grace*. We talk a lot about original sin, but we have also received an original grace, of which often we are unaware.

What is it, this original grace? It is what we received on the day of our Baptism, which is why it is good for us to remember, and even celebrate it! I will ask you a question: this grace received on the day of Baptism, it is important. But how many of you remember the date of your Baptism, what is the date of your own Baptism? Think about it. And if you do not remember, when you go home, ask your godfather, your godmother, your father or mother: "When was I baptized?", because that day is the day of the great grace, of a new life beginning, of an original grace that we have. God descended into our lives that day, and we became his beloved children forever.

This is our original beauty, for which to be joyful! Today, Mary, surprised by the grace that made her beautiful from the first instant of her life, leads us to marvel at our beauty. We can grasp this through the image of the white Baptismal garment; it reminds us that, beyond the evil we have stained ourselves with over the years, there is a good in us greater than all the evils that have befallen. Let us listen to the echo, let us hear God saying to us: "Son, daughter, I love you and I am with you always, you are important to me, your life is precious". That is God's message to us. When things do not go well and we are discouraged, when we are downcast and risk feeling useless or wrong, let us think about this, about this original grace. And God is with us, God is with me from that day. Let us think about it again.

Today the Word of God teaches us another important thing: that to safeguard our beauty demands a cost, it demands a struggle. Indeed, the Gospel shows us the courage of Mary who said "Yes" to God, who chose *the risk of God*; and the passage from Genesis, on original sin, speaks to us of a battle against the tempter and his temptations (cf. *Gen* 3:15). But we know this from experience too, all of us: it takes effort to choose good, it costs us; it takes effort to safeguard the good that is in us. Think of how many times we have squandered it by giving in to the lure of evil, being crafty for our own interests or doing something that would defile our hearts; or even wasting time in useless or harmful things, putting off prayer, for example, and saying "Today I can't", or saying "I can't" to those who have needed us, when instead we could have.

But today, faced with all this, we have good news: Mary, the only human being in history without sin, is with us in the battle, she is our sister and, above all, our Mother. And we, who struggle to choose good, can *entrust ourselves to her*. By entrusting ourselves, consecrating ourselves to Mary, we say to her: "Take me by the hand, Mother, guide me: with you I will have more strength in the battle against evil; with you I will rediscover my original beauty". Let us entrust ourselves to Mary today, let us entrust ourselves to Mary every day, repeating to her: "Mary, I entrust my life to you, I entrust my family, my work, I entrust my heart and my struggles. I consecrate myself to you". May Mary Immaculate help us to safeguard our beauty from evil.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims. In particular, I greet the followers of the Christian Workers' Movement and the representation from Rocca di Papa with the torch that will light the Christmas Star at the summit of the town.

On the Feast of Mary Immaculate, Italian Catholic Action is living the renewal of its membership. I address my thought to its diocesan and parish associations, encouraging everyone to go forward with joy in the service of the Gospel and of the Church.

This afternoon I will go to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major to pray to the Salus Populi Romani, and straight afterwards to the Spanish Steps to perform the traditional act of homage and prayer at the foot of the monument to Mary Immaculate. I ask you to join with me spiritually in this gesture, which expresses filial devotion to our Mother, to whose intercession we entrust the universal desire for peace, in particular for martyred Ukraine, which suffers greatly. I think of the Angel's words to Mary: "With God nothing will be impossible". With God's help, peace is possible; disarmament is possible. But God wants our good will. May Our Lady help us to convert to God's plans.

I wish you all a blessed feast day and a good Advent journey, to all those who are here: to the young people of the *Immacolata*, today it is their feast! May Our Lady help us. God wants our good will: may Our Lady help us to convert to God's plans. Happy feast day, and a happy Advent journey, and please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci*!