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## The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, 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!*

The Gospel from today's liturgy (*Mt 4:12-23*) narrates the call of the first disciples who, along the lake of Galilee *leave everything to follow Jesus*. He had already met some of them, thanks to John the Baptist, and God had placed the seed of faith within them (cf. *Jn 1:35-39*). So now, Jesus goes back to look for them where they live and work. The Lord always looks for us. The Lord always draws near to us, always. This time, he extends a direct call to them: "Follow me!" (*Mt 4:19*). And "immediately they left their nets and followed him" (v. 20). Let's take a moment to reflect on this scene. This is the moment of a decisive encounter with Jesus, one they would remember their entire lives and would be included in the Gospel. From then on, they follow Jesus. And in order to follow him, they leave.

*To leave so as to follow*. And it is always like this with Jesus. It can begin in some way with a sense of attraction, perhaps due to others. Then the awareness can become more personal and can kindle a light in the heart. It becomes something beautiful to share: "You know, that passage from the Gospel struck me.... That service opportunity I had struck me..." – something that touches your heart. This is what happened with the first disciples (cf. *Jn 1:40-42*). But sooner or later, the moment comes in which it is necessary *to leave so as to follow* (cf. *Lk 11:27-28*). That is when it is necessary to make a decision: Shall I leave behind some certainties and embark on a new adventure, or shall I remain like I am? This is a decisive moment for every Christian because the meaning of everything else is at stake here. If someone does not find the courage to set out on the journey, the risk is to remain a spectator of one's own existence and to live the faith halfway.

To stay with Jesus, therefore, requires the courage to leave, to set out on the journey. What must we leave behind? Our vices and our sins, certainly, which are like anchors that hold us at bay and prevent us from setting sail. To begin to leave, it is only right that we begin by asking forgiveness – forgiveness for the things that are not beautiful. I leave these things behind to move forward. But it is also necessary to leave behind what holds us back from living fully, for example, fear, selfish calculations, the guarantees that come from staying safe, just getting by. It also means giving up the time wasted on so many useless things. How beautiful it would be to leave all this in order to experience, for example, the tiring but rewarding risk of service, or to dedicate time to prayer so as to grow in friendship with the Lord. I am also thinking of a young family who leaves behind a quiet life to open themselves up to the unpredictable and beautiful adventure of motherhood and fatherhood. It is a sacrifice, but all it takes is one look at a child to understand that it was the right choice to leave behind certain rhythms and comforts to have this joy. I am also thinking, of certain professionals, for example, doctors or healthcare workers, who give up a lot of free time to study and prepare themselves, and who do good, dedicating many hours day and night, and spend so much physical and mental energy for the sick. I think of workers who leave behind convenience, who let go of doing nothing so as to put food on the table. In short, to live life, we need to accept the challenge to leave. Today, Jesus extends this invitation to each of us.

So, I leave you with a question about this. First of all: Can I remember a “strong moment” in which I have already encountered Jesus? Each of us can recall our own story – in my life, has there been a significant moment when I encountered Jesus? And, is there something beautiful and significant that happened in my life because of which I left other less important things? And today, is there something Jesus asks me to give up? What are the material things, ways of thinking, attitudes I need to leave behind so as to truly say “yes”? May Mary help us to respond with a total “yes” to God, like she did, to know what to leave behind so as to follow him better. Do not be afraid to leave if it is to follow Jesus. We will always find that we are better.

### After the Angelus

This Third Sunday of Ordinary Time is dedicated in a special way to the Word of God. Let us rediscover with awe the fact that God speaks to us, especially through the Sacred Scriptures. Let us read them, study them, meditate on them, pray over them. Let us read a passage from the Bible every day, especially from the Gospel. Jesus speaks to us there, he enlightens us, he guides us. And I remind you of something I have said other times: Let’s have a small Gospel, a pocket-size Gospel, to take in your bag, always with us. And when there is a moment during the day, read something from the Gospel. It is Jesus who accompanies us. So, a small pocket-size Gospel always with us.

Today I would like to express my wish for peace and every good to all those in the Far East, and in various parts of the world, who are celebrating the Lunar New Year. Nevertheless, on this joyous occasion, I cannot fail to mention my spiritual nearness to those who are going through difficult times due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the hope that these present difficulties might soon be overcome. Lastly, I hope that the kindness, sensitivity, solidarity and harmony that are being experienced in the families who are reunited in these days as is customary, might ever more permeate and characterize our family and social relationships so as to live a serene and happy life. Happy New Year!

Sadly, my thought turns in particular to Myanmar, where the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in the Village of Can Thar – one of the most ancient and important places of worship in the country – was burned and destroyed. I am close to the helpless civilian population subject to severe trials in many cities. Please God that this conflict will soon come to an end, opening a new period of forgiveness, love and peace. Let us pray together to Our Lady for Myanmar. [Recitation of the Hail Mary...]

I also invite you to pray that the acts of violence in Peru might cease. Violence quenches the hope for a just solution to problems. I encourage all the parties involved to undertake the path of dialogue as brothers of the same nation, in full respect for human rights and the rule of law. I join the Peruvian Bishops in saying: *¡No a la violencia, venga de donde venga! ¡No más muertes!* [No to violence wherever it comes from! No more deaths!]

There are Peruvians in the Square....

Positive signs are coming from Cameroon that bring the hope of progress toward the resolution of the conflict in the English-speaking regions. I encourage all the parties who have signed the Agreement to persevere on the path of dialogue and mutual understanding, for only through encounter can the future be designed.

I extend my greeting to all of you, those from Italy and other countries. I greet the pilgrims from Spalato, Warsaw – there are many Poles I see because of the flags – and Mérida-Badajoz (Spain), as well as those from Ascoli Piceno, Montesilvano and Gela; the group from Guardian Angel School, Alessandria; those from Gioventù Ardente Mariana [Fervent Marian Youth] from Rome; and members of the Association of Catholic Psychologists.

In these days, as we pray in particular for the full unity of all Christians, please, let us not forget, to pray for peace for war-torn Ukraine. May the Lord comfort and sustain that people who are suffering so much! They are suffering so much!

I wish all of you a good Sunday. Even the young people of the Immacolata. And please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch and *arrivederci*.

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