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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 says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil" (*Mt 5:17*). *To fulfil*: this is a key word to understand Jesus and his message. But what does this fulfilment mean? To explain, the Lord begins by saying what is *not* fulfilment. The Scripture says "Do not kill", but for Jesus this is not enough if brothers are then hurt by words; the Scripture says "Do not commit adultery", but this is not enough if one then lives a love tainted by duplicity and falsehood; the Scripture says "Do not bear false witness", but it is not enough to take a solemn oath if one then acts with hypocrisy (cf. *Mt 5:21-37*). This is not fulfilment.

To give a concrete example, Jesus concentrates on the "rite of the offertory". Making an offering to God reciprocates the gratuity of his gifts. It was a very important rite – making an offering to reciprocate symbolically, let's say, the gratuitousness of his gifts – so important that to interrupt it was forbidden other than for serious reasons. But Jesus states that it must be interrupted if a brother has something against us, in order to go and be reconciled with him first (cf. vv.23-24): only in this way is the rite *fulfilled*. The message is clear: God loves us first, freely, taking the first step towards us, without us deserving it; and so we cannot celebrate his love without in our turn taking the first step towards reconciliation with those who have hurt us. In this way there is fulfilment in God's eyes, otherwise external, purely ritualistic observance is pointless, it becomes a pretence. In other words, Jesus makes us understand that religious rules are necessary, they are good, but they are only the beginning: to fulfil them, it is necessary to go beyond the letter and live their meaning. The commandments that

God has given us must not be locked up in the airless vaults of formal observance; otherwise, we are limited to an exterior, detached religiosity, servants of “God the Master” rather than children of “God the Father”. Jesus wants this: not to have the idea of serving a God the Master, but the Father; and this is why it is necessary to go beyond the letter.

Brothers and sisters, this problem was present not only in Jesus’ time; it is there today too. At times, for example, we hear it said, “Father, I have not killed, I have not stolen, I have not harmed anyone...”, as if to say, “I am fine”. This is formal observance, which is satisfied with the *bare minimum*, whereas Jesus invites us to aspire to the *maximum possible*. That is: God does not reason with calculations and tables; he loves us as one who is enamoured: not to the minimum, but to the maximum! He does not say, “I love you up to a certain point”. No, true love is never up to a certain point, and is never satisfied; love always goes beyond, one cannot do without. The Lord showed us this by giving his life on the cross and forgiving his murderers (cf. *Lk 23:34*). And he entrusted to us the commandment most dear to him: that we love each other *like he* loved us (cf. *Jn 15:12*). This is the love that gives fulfilment to the Law, to faith, to true life!

So, brothers and sisters, we might ask ourselves: how do I live faith? Is it a matter of calculations, formalism, or a love story with God? Am I content merely with not doing harm, of keeping the “façade” in good order, or do I try to grow in love for God and others? And every now and then, do I check myself on Jesus’ great commandment, do I ask myself if I love my neighbour as He loves me? Because perhaps we are inflexible in judging others and forget to be merciful, as God is with us.

May Mary, who observed the Word of God perfectly, help us to give fulfilment to our faith and our charity.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

Let us continue to stay close, with prayer and concrete support, to the earthquake victims in Syria and Turkey. I saw on the television programme “*A Sua Immagine*” the images of this catastrophe, the pain of these peoples who are suffering as a result of the earthquake. Let us pray for them, let us not forget them, let us pray and think about what we can do for them. And let us not forget tormented Ukraine: may the Lord open ways of peace and give those responsible the courage to follow them.

The news from Nicaragua has saddened me a great deal, and I cannot but remember with concern Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, whom I care about greatly, sentenced to 26 years imprisonment, and also those who have been deported to the United States. I pray for them and for all those who are suffering in that dear nation, and I ask for your prayers. Let us also ask the Lord, by the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to open the hearts of political leaders and all citizens to the sincere search for peace, which is born of truth, justice, freedom and love, and which is achieved through the patient pursuit of dialogue. Let us pray together to Our Lady. [*Hail Mary*]

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and other countries. I greet the groups from Poland, the Czech Republic and Peru. I greet the Congolese citizens who are present here. Your country is beautiful, it is beautiful! Pray for the country! I greet the students from Badajoz, Spain, and those of the Gregorian Institute of Lisbon.

I greet the young people of Amendolara-Cozenza and the AVIS group from Villa Estense-Padua.

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