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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!*

I wish to express my gratitude to those who, during the days of my stay at the Gemelli Hospital, showed me affection, care and friendship, and assured me of the support of prayer. This human closeness and spiritual closeness were of great help and comfort to me. Thank you all! Thank you! Thank you from my heart!

Today, in the Gospel, Jesus calls by name – he calls by name - and sends out the twelve Apostles. By sending them, he asks them to proclaim just one thing: "Preach as you go, saying 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Mt 10:7). It is the same proclamation with which Jesus began his preaching: the kingdom of God, that is, his lordship of love, has come near, it comes in our midst. And this is not just one piece of news among others, no, but the fundamental reality of life: the vicinity of God, the vicinity of Jesus.

Indeed, if the God of heaven is close, we are not alone on earth, and even in difficulty we do not lose faith. Here is the first thing to say to people: God is not far away, but he is a Father. God is not distant, he is a Father, he knows you and he loves you; he wants to take you by the hand, even when you travel on steep and rugged paths, even when you fall and struggle to get up again and get back on track. He, the Lord, is there with you. Indeed, often in the moments when you are at your weakest, you can feel his presence all the more strongly. He knows the path, he is with you, he is your Father! He is my Father! He is our Father!

Let us remain with this image, because proclaiming God as close to us is inviting you to think like a child, who walks held by his father's hand: everything seems different. The world, large and mysterious, becomes familiar and secure, because the child knows he is protected. He is not afraid, and learns how to open up: he meets other people, finds new friends, learns with joy things that he did not know, and then returns home and tells everyone what he has seen, while within him there grows the desire to become grown up and to do the things he has seen his daddy do. This is why Jesus starts out from here, this is why God's vicinity is the first proclamation: by staying close to God, we conquer fear, we open ourselves to love, we grow in goodness and we feel the need and the joy to proclaim.

If we want to be good apostles, we must be like children: we must sit "on God's lap" and, from there, look at the world with trust and love, in order to bear witness that God is the Father, that he alone transforms our hearts and gives us that joy and that peace that we ourselves cannot attain.

To proclaim that God is near – but how can we do this? In the Gospel, Jesus recounts and recommends not saying many words, but performing many deeds of love and hope in the name of the Lord. Not saying many words, performing deeds! "Heal the sick", says the Lord, "raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay" (*Mt* 10:8). Here is the heart of proclamation: witness freely given, service. I will tell you something: I am always puzzled, very puzzled, by the "talkers" with their endless talk and no action.

At this point, let us ask a few questions: we, who believe in God who is close, I wonder: do we confide in him? Do we know how to look forward trustfully, like a child who knows he is held in his father's arms? Do we know how to sit in the Father's lap with prayer, by listening to the Word, partaking of the Sacraments? And finally, close to him, do we know how to instil courage in others, to make ourselves close to those who suffer and are alone, to those who are distant and even those who are hostile? This is the substance of faith. This is what counts.

And let us now pray to Mary; may she help us feel we are loved and transmit closeness and trust.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Next Tuesday, 20 June, will be the World Day of Refugees, organized by the United Nations: with great sorrow and heartache I think of the victims of the serious shipwreck that occurred in recent days off the coast of Greece. And it seemed as though the sea were calm. I reiterate my prayer for those who have lost their lives, and I implore that everything possible always be done to prevent similar tragedies.

And I pray also for the young students, victims of the brutal attack against a school in the west of Uganda. This battle, this war everywhere... let us pray for peace!

I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and many other countries, especially the faithful of Florida and Munich. I greet the "Saint John Paul II" School of Opole, Poland, and the "Saint Philip Neri" School of London.

I also greet the groups from Zogno, Guardiagrele and Poggiomarino, as well as the "Rosario Scardigno" School of Molfetta. And I also greet the sisters of *Maria Bambina* who are watching the Angelus.

Let us persevere in prayer for the population of tormented Ukraine – let us not forget them! – who suffer greatly.

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

