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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli prayer

At midday today, fourth Sunday of Easter, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the *Regina Caeli* with the approximately fifteen thousand faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

The following are the Pope's words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

Dear brothers and sisters, happy Sunday!

This Sunday, is dedicated to Jesus the Good Shepherd. In today's Gospel (cf. Jn 10:11-18), Jesus tells us that, "The good shepherd *lays down his life* for the sheep" (v. 11). He highlights this aspect so much that He repeats it three times (cf. vv. 11, 15, 17). But in what sense, I ask myself, does the shepherd *give his life* for the sheep?

Being a shepherd, especially in Christ's time, was not just a job, it was a way of life: it was not an occupation which took up a defined amount of time, but it meant sharing entire days, and even nights, with the sheep, living- I would say- in symbiosis with them. Indeed, Jesus explains that He is not a hired man who cares nothing for the sheep (cf. v. 13), but a man who knows them (cf. v. 14): He knows the sheep. This is the way things are, He, the Lord, the shepherd of us all, calls us by our name and, when we are lost, He looks for us until He finds us (cf. Lk 15:4-5). Moreover, Jesus is not just a good shepherd who shares the life of the flock; Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has sacrificed His life for us and, has given us His Spirit through His resurrection.

This is what the Lord wants to tell us with the image of the Good Shepherd: not only that He is the guide, the Head of the flock, but above all that He thinks about every one of us, and that He thinks of each of us as *the love of His life*. Consider this: for Christ, I am important, He thinks of me, I am irreplaceable, worth the infinite price of His life. And this is not just a way of speaking: He truly gave His life for me, He died and rose again for me. Why? Because He loves me and He finds in me a beauty that I often do not see myself.

Brothers and sisters, how many people today think of themselves as inadequate or even wrong! How many

times do we think that our value depends on the goals we achieve, on whether we succeed in the eyes of the world, on the judgments of others! And how many times do we end up throwing ourselves away for trivial things! Today Jesus tells us that we are always infinitely worthy in His eyes. So, in order to find ourselves, the first thing to do is to place ourselves in His presence, allowing ourselves to be welcomed and lifted up by the loving arms of our Good Shepherd.

Brothers, sisters, let us ask ourselves: am I able to find the time, every day, to embrace this assurance that gives value to my life? Am I able to find the time for a moment of prayer, of adoration, of praise, to be in the presence of Christ and to let myself be caressed by Him? Brother, sister, the Good Shepherd tells us that if you do this, you will rediscover the secret of life: you will remember that He gave His life for you, for me, for all of us. And that for Him, we are all important, each and every one of us.

May Our Lady help us to find in Jesus what is essential for life.

After the *Regina Caeli*

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which has as its theme "Called to sow hope and build peace." It is a good opportunity to rediscover the Church as a community characterized by an orchestra of charisms and vocations in the service of the Gospel. In this context, I extend my heartfelt greetings to the new priests of the Diocese of Rome, who were ordained yesterday afternoon in St. Peter's Basilica. Let us pray for them!

It is with concern and also with grief that I am continuing to follow the situation in the Middle East. I renew my appeal not to give in to the logic of vengeance and war. May the paths of dialogue and diplomacy, which can do so much, prevail. I pray every day for peace in Palestine and Israel, and I hope that these two peoples may stop suffering soon. And let us not forget martyred Ukraine, the martyred Ukraine which suffers so much because of the war.

It is with sorrow, that I have received the news of the death, in an accident, of Father Matteo Pettinari, a young missionary of the *Consolata* in the Ivory Coast. He was known as the "tireless missionary," who left a great testimony of generous service. Let us pray for his soul.

I extend a warm welcome to all of you people of Rome and pilgrims from Italy and from many countries. I greet the Apostoline Sisters with affection: thank you for your joyful service in the ministry for vocations! I greet the faithful from Viterbo, Brescia, Alba Adriatica, and Arezzo; as well as the *Rotary Club Galatina Maglie e Terre d'Otranto*, the young people from Capocroce, the young candidates for Confirmation from Azzano Mella, and the parish of *Sant'Agnese* in Rome.

I wish you all a good Sunday. And I greet the students of the *Immacolata*, well done! Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
