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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli prayer

At midday today, sixth 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 twenty 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, good morning!

Today the Gospel tells us about Jesus who says to the Apostles: "I do not call you servants any longer, but friends" (cf. *Jn* 15:15). What does this mean?

In the Bible the "servants" of God are special people, to whom He entrusts important missions, such as, for example, Moses (cf. *Ex* 14:31), King David (cf. *2 Sam* 7:8), the prophet Elijah (cf. *1 Re* 18:36), up to the Virgin Mary (cf. *Lk* 1:38). They are people in whose hands God places His treasures (cf. *Mt* 25:21). But all of this is not enough, according to Jesus, to say who we are for Him, it is not enough: He wants more, something greater, that goes beyond goods and plans themselves: it takes *friendship*.

Since childhood we learn how beautiful this experience is: we offer friends our toys and the most beautiful gifts; then, growing up, as teenagers, we confide our first secrets to them; as young people we offer loyalty; as adults we share satisfactions and worries; as seniors we share the memories, considerations and silences of long days. The Word of God, in the Book of Proverbs, tells us that "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel" (27:9). Let us think a moment of our friends, and thank the Lord for them! A space for thinking about them...

Friendship is not the fruit of calculation, nor of compulsion: it is born spontaneously when we recognize something of ourselves in the other. And, if it is true, a friendship is so strong that it does not fail even in the face of betrayal. "A friend loves at all times" (*Pr* 17:17) – states the Book of Proverbs again – as Jesus shows us when He says to Judas, who betrays Him with a kiss: "Friend, why are you here?" (*Mt* 26:50). A true friend does not abandon you, even when you make mistakes: he corrects you, perhaps he reproaches you, but he forgives

you and does not abandon you.

And today Jesus, in the Bible, tells us that for Him we are precisely this, friends: dear people beyond all merit and expectation, to whom He extends His hand and offers His love, His Grace, His Word; with whom – with us, friends – He shares what is dearest to Him, all that He has heard from the Father (cf. *Jn 15:15*). Even to the point of making himself fragile for us, of placing Himself in our hands without defence or pretence, because He loves us. The Lord loves us, as a friend He wants our good and He wants us to share in his.

And so let us ask ourselves: what face does the Lord have for me? The face of a friend or of a stranger? Do I feel loved by Him as a dear person? And what is the face of Jesus that I show to others, especially to those who err and need forgiveness?

May Mary help us to grow in friendship with Her Son and to spread it around us.

After the *Regina Caeli*

Dear brothers and sisters!

I send with great affection my best wishes to the brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Churches and some of the Eastern Catholic Churches who today, according to the Julian Calendar, celebrate Holy Easter. May the Risen Lord fill all the communities with joy and peace, and comfort those who are facing adversity. To them, happy Easter!

I assure my prayer for the populations of the State of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, stuck by major floods. May the Lord receive the deceased and comfort their relatives and those who have had to leave their homes.

I greet the faithful of Rome and various parts of Italy and the world, in particular the pilgrims from Texas, from the archdiocese of Chicago and from Berlin; students from the *Saint-Jean de Passy* School of Paris and the Human Life International group. I greet the young people of Certaldo and Lainate; the faithful of Ancona and Rossano Cariati; candidates for confirmation from Cassano D'Adda, the pastoral unit of Tesino and the parish of *Santa Maria del Rosario* in Rome. And I greet and thank warmly the musical bands from various parts of Italy: thanks to you, who have played so well, and I hope that you will continue to play a little. Thank you! I greet the "Francigeni Monteviale" group, as well as the citizens of Livorno and Collesalvetti, who have been waiting long for the reclamation of some of the most polluted areas. Let us pray for them.

I send a warm greeting to the new Swiss Guards and their families, on the occasion of the feast of this historic and praiseworthy Corps. A round of applause to the Swiss Guards!

I welcome with pleasure the "Meter" Association, engaged in combating every form of abuse of minors. Thank you, thank you for your commitment! And continue your important work with courage.

And please, continue to pray for tormented Ukraine – it suffers a great deal! – and also for Palestine and Israel, that they may be peace, that dialogue may be strengthened and bear good fruit. No to war, yes to dialogue!

I wish everyone a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. I greet the young people of the Immacolata, who are so good. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
