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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli prayer

At midday today, seventh 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, happy Sunday!

And now, I would like to wish a happy Sunday to the young people of Genoa.

Today, in Italy and in other countries, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated. The Gospel of the Mass states that Jesus, after entrusting the task of continuing His work to the Apostles, "was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (*Mk 16:19*). This is what the Gospel says: He "was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God".

Jesus' return to the Father appears to us not as His detachment from us, but rather like preceding us to the destination, which is Heaven. Just as, when in the mountains, one ascends to a summit: one walks, with difficulty, and finally, at a turn in the path, the horizon opens up and one sees the panorama. Then the whole body finds the strength to tackle the final ascent. The whole body - arms, legs and every muscle - tenses up and concentrates to reach the peak.

And we, the Church are precisely that body that Jesus, having ascended to Heaven, pulls along with Him, like a roped party. It is He who awakens us and communicates to us, with His Word and with the grace of the Sacraments, the beauty of the Homeland towards which we are headed. Hence, we too, His members – we are the members of Jesus – ascend with joy together with Him, our leader, knowing that the step of one is a step for all, and that no-one must be lost or left behind, because we are but one body (cf. *Col 1:18; 1 Cor 12:12-27*).

Listen carefully: step by step, one rung at a time, Jesus shows us the way. What are these steps that must be taken? Today's Gospel says: "preach the Gospel, baptize, cast out demons, pick up serpents, lay hands on the sick" (cf. *Mk* 16:16.18); in summary, to perform the works of love: to give life, bring hope, steer away from any form of wickedness and meanness, respond to evil with good, be close to those who suffer. This is the "step by step". And the more we do this, the more we let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit, the more we follow His example, as in the mountains, we feel the air around us become light and clean, the horizon broad and the destination near, words and gestures become good, the mind and heart expand and breathe.

And so, we can ask ourselves: is the desire for God, the desire for His infinite love, for His life that is eternal life, alive in me? Or am I a bit dulled and anchored to passing things, or money, or success, or pleasure? And does my desire for Heaven isolate me, does it seal me off, or does it lead me to love my brothers and sisters with a big and selfless heart, to feel that they are my companions on the journey towards Paradise?

May Mary, She who has already arrived at the destination, help us to walk together with joy towards the glory of Heaven.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters!

As we celebrate the Ascension of the Risen Lord, who frees us and wants us free, I renew my appeal for a general exchange of all the prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, assuring the willingness of the Holy See to favour any effort in this regard, especially for those who are gravely injured and ill. And let us continue to pray for peace in Ukraine, in Palestine, in Israel, in Myanmar... Let us pray for peace.

Today is World Day of Social Communications, on the theme "Artificial intelligence and the wisdom of the heart". Only by restoring a wisdom of the heart can we interpret the demands of our time and rediscover the way towards a fully human communication. Our thanks go to all communication workers for their work!

Today many countries celebrate Mothers' Day: let us think gratefully of all mothers, and let us also pray for the mothers who have gone to Heaven. And let us entrust mothers to the protection of Mary, our heavenly mother. A big round of applause to all mothers!

I greet the pilgrims from Rome and various parts of Italy and the world, in particular those from Hungary and Malta, students of the *Colégio da São Tomás* of Lisbon, and the musical bands from Austria and Germany, who pay homage to the memory of Pope Benedict XVI. They play well! Thank you. I also greet the faithful of Pesaro, Cagliari, Giulianova Lido, and those from Ponti sul Mincio who have come by bicycle, the AVIS blood donors, the "Young Mountain" Association of Turin, the candidates for Confirmation from Genoa, and people affected by fibromyalgia, on the Day dedicated to this pathology.

I thank the organizers of the photographic exhibition "*Changes*", on display beneath the Colonnade of Saint Peter's Square. Photographs from all over the world document the beauty of our common home, the gift of the Creator we are required to safeguard. I invite you to visit this exhibition!

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