



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
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**Audience of the Holy Father Francis with the “Proyecto Esperanza” Group of the Latin American Episcopal Council (C.E.L.A.M.)**

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the “Proyecto Esperanza” Group of the Latin American Episcopal Council (C.E.L.A.M.)

The following is the Pope’s greeting to those present:

**Greeting of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to receive you in the house of Peter and of all the Church, for the happy celebration of your twenty-five years of service to people whose suffering is indescribable.

The arrival of each newborn child is often synonymous with a joy that fills us in a mysterious way, and renews our hope. It is as if we perceive, without knowing how to explain it, that each child is a proclamation of the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, of God’s desire to dwell in our hearts.

Perhaps that is why the Lord, in the teaching of His Gospel, wanted to make us participants in a sorrow which, being the antithesis of that joy, shocks us in a brutal way: “In Ramah is heard the sound of sobbing, bitter weeping! Rachel mourns for her children, she refuses to be consoled, for her children, they are no more” (*Jer* 31:15).

An ancient author quoted by Saint Thomas Aquinas interpreted this text by saying that the first groaning referred to the children, the holy innocents, and their pain ceased with death, while the bitter weeping was the lament of mothers “which is always renewed by memory” (*Catena Aurea Mt* 2,17-18).

The text of Saint Matthew continues with the flight into Egypt, almost as if to say that such a great evil keeps Jesus away from us, prevents Him from entering our home, from having a place in our inn. But we must not lose hope, evil does not have the last word, it is never definitive. Like the angel in Saint Joseph's dream, God announces to us that, after this desert, the Lord will return to take possession of His house.

For many people, you are like this angel, and I thank you for that. Trust in the steady hand of Saint Joseph, so that these sisters of ours may encounter Jesus amid the desolation. With Him, they will come to the warm and safe home of Nazareth, where they will experience inner silence and the peaceful joy of being welcomed and forgiven in the bosom of the Holy Family.

May Jesus bless them and may the Holy Virgin, *la tota Pulchra*, shield them with the splendour of her mantle. Thank you very much.

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