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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with the approximately 250,000 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 and happy feast day!

Today, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the Gospel tells us about one of the most important, most beautiful moments in the history of humanity: the Annunciation (cf. *Lk* 26-38), when Mary's "yes" to the Archangel Gabriel permitted the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus. It is a scene that inspires the greatest wonder and emotion because God, the Most High, the Omnipotent, by means of the Angel converses with a young girl from Nazareth, asking for her collaboration for His plan of salvation. If today you find a little time, look in the Gospel of Saint Luke and read this scene. I assure you that it will do you good, a lot of good!

As in the scene of the creation of Adam, painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, where the finger of the heavenly Father touches the finger of the man; thus here too the human and the divine encounter each other, at the beginning of our Redemption, they meet with a wonderful delicacy, in the blessed instant in which the Virgin Mary utters her "yes". She is a woman in a small peripheral village and is called for ever to the centre of history: on her answer depends the fate of humanity, which can smile and hope again, because its destiny has been placed in good hands. She will be the one to bear the Saviour, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Mary, then, as the Archangel Gabriel greets her, is "full of grace" (*Lk* 1:28), the Immaculate, entirely at the service of the Word of God, always with the Lord, to whom she entrusts herself completely. In her, there is nothing that resists His will, nothing that opposes truth and charity. Here is her blessedness, which all generations will sing. Let us also rejoice because the Immaculate has given us Jesus, who is our salvation!

Brothers and sisters, contemplating this mystery we can ask ourselves: in our time, ravaged by wars and bent on the effort to possess and dominate, where do I place my hope? In strength, in money, in powerful friends? Do I place my hope there? Or in God's infinite mercy? And in the face of the shiny false models circulating in the media and on the internet, where do I look for my happiness? Where is the treasure of my heart? Is it in the fact that God loves me freely, that His love always goes before me, and is ready to forgive me when I return repentant to Him? In that filial hope in God's love? Or am I deluding myself in trying to assert my ego and my will at all costs?

Brothers and sisters, as the opening of the Holy Door of the Jubilee approaches, let us open the doors of the heart and the mind to the Lord. He is born of Mary Immaculate: let us implore the intercession of Mary. And I will give you a piece of advice. Today it is a good day to decide to make a good Confession. If you cannot go today, this week, until next Sunday, open your heart and the Lord will forgive everything, everything, everything. And so, in Mary's hands, we will be happier.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

On this solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, I am especially close to the Nicaraguans. I invite you to join in prayer for the Church and the people of Nicaragua, who celebrate the Most Pure, as Mother and Patroness, and raises to her a cry of faith and hope. May the heavenly Mother be a consolation for them in difficulties and uncertainties, and open everyone's hearts, so that the way of respectful and constructive dialogue may be sought, in order to promote peace, fraternity and harmony in the country.

And let us continue to pray for peace, in tormented Ukraine, in the Middle East – Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, now in Syria – in Myanmar, Sudan and wherever people suffer from war and violence. I appeal to governors and the international community, so that we may reach the feast of the Nativity with a ceasefire on all fronts of war.

I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims. In particular, the pilgrimage of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart from Spain, the "Oasi Mamma dell'Amore" group, the faithful from the United States, from Honduras and Australia, as well as those of Calderara di Reno, Corpòlo and Grado, and the candidates for Confirmation from the parish of *San Pio da Pietrelcina* in Rome.

Today, it comes to my heart to ask you all to pray for the prisoners who are on death row in the United States. I believe there are thirteen or fifteen of them. Let us pray that their sentence be commuted, changed. Let us think of these brothers and sisters of ours and ask the Lord for the grace to save them from death.

Today in Italian parishes, adhesion to Catholic Action is renewed. I wish all members a good journey of foration, service and apostolic commitment. I heartily bless the faithful of Rocca di Papa and the torch with which they will light the great star on the Fortress of their beautiful town in honour of Mary Immaculate. And I am close to the workers of Siena, Fabriano and Ascoli Piceno who are defending in solidarity the right to work, which is a right to dignity! May their work not be taken away for economic and financial reasons.

I wish you all a good Sunday and a happy feast of Mary Immaculate. We will see each other this afternoon in Piazza di Spagna. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
