



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

This morning, in the Casa Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the children assisted by the "Santa Marta" Paediatric Dispensary in the Vatican, together with their families. The young people celebrated the Pope's birthday and the arrival of Christmas. The celebration then continued in the Atrium of the Paul VI Hall.

Then, at midday, from the Casa Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis led the recitation of the Angelus prayer, and blessed the "Bambinelli", the statuettes of the infant Jesus.

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

Dear brothers and sisters, buongiorno!

I am sorry not to be with you in the Square, but I am getting better and precautions must be taken.

Today the Gospel presents us with Mary who, after the annunciation of the Angel, visits Elizabeth, her elderly relative (cf. *Lk* 1:39-45), who is also expecting a child. Theirs is thus the meeting of two women rejoicing at the extraordinary gift of motherhood: Mary has just conceived Jesus, the Saviour of the world (cf. *Lk* 1:31-35), and Elizabeth, despite her advanced age, is carrying John, who will prepare the way before the Messiah (cf. *Lk* 1:13-17), John the Baptist.

They both have much to rejoice about, and perhaps we might feel they are far away, the protagonists of such great miracles that do not normally figure in our experience. The message the Evangelist wants to give us, a few days before Christmas, is this, it is different. Indeed, contemplating the miraculous signs of God's salvific action must never make us feel far from Him, but rather help us to recognize His presence and His love close to you, for example in the gift of every life, of every child, of his or her mother. The gift of life. I read, on the programme "A tua immagine", a beautiful thing that was written: *no child is a mistake!* The gift of life.

In the Square, even today, there will be mothers with their children, and perhaps they are some who are expecting. Please, let us not remain indifferent to their presence: let us learn to marvel at their beauty, as Elizabeth and Mary did, that beauty of expectant mothers. Let us bless mothers and give praise to God for the miracle of life! I like – I used to like, because now I cannot do it – when I used to take the bus, in the other diocese, when an expectant mother got on the bus, I would immediately offer her my seat: it is a gesture of hope and respect!

Brothers and sisters, in these days we like to create a festive atmosphere with lights, decorations and Christmas music. Let us remember, though, to express feelings of joy every time we encounter a mother who is carrying a child in her arms or in her womb. And when it happens to us, let us pray in our heart and let us say too, like Elizabeth, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (*Lk 1:42*); let us sing, like Mary, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (*Lk 1:46*), so that every motherhood may be blessed, and in every mother in the world may the name of God be thanked and exalted, who entrusts men and women with the power to give life to children!

We will soon bless the “Bambinelli” you have brought. I have brought mine: this one was given to me by the Archbishop of Santa Fé; it was made by native Ecuadorian people... the *Bambinelli* you have brought. We can ask ourselves, then, do I thank the Lord because He made Himself a man like us, to share in all of our existence, apart from sin? Do I praise the Lord and bless Him for every child who is born? When I encounter an expectant mother, am I kind to her? Do I support and defend the sacred value of the life of the little ones ever since their conception in the maternal womb?

May Mary, Blessed among women, make us capable of experiencing wonder and gratitude before the mystery of nascent life.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

I follow with attention and concern the news from Mozambique, and I wish to reiterate my message of hope, peace and reconciliation to that beloved people. I pray that dialogue and the quest for the common good, supported by faith and good will, may prevail over mistrust and discord.

Tormented Ukraine continues to be struck by attacks against the city, which at times damage schools, hospitals, and churches. May the weapons be silenced and Christmas carols resound! Let us pray for a ceasefire on all war fronts, in Ukraine, the Holy Land, in all the Middle East and the entire world, at Christmas. And with sorrow I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty; of the children machine-gunned, the bombing of schools and hospitals... So much cruelty!

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims, with affection. I greet the delegation of Italian citizens who live in territories that have been waiting for a long time for reclamation in order to protect their health. I express my closeness to these populations, especially to those who suffered the recent tragedy in Calenzano.

This morning, I had the joy of being with the children, with their mothers, who attend the Santa Marta Dispensary in the Vatican, run by the Vincentian Sisters. They are good nuns! Among them there is one nun who is like a grandmother to everyone, the good Sister Antoinette, whom I remember with great love. And these children – there were many of them! – filled my heart with joy. I repeat: “No child is a mistake”.

And now I will bless the “Bambinelli”: I have brought mine. The statuettes of the Infant Jesus that you, dear children and young people, have brought here and which then, returning home, you will put in the Nativity scene. I thank you for this simple but important gesture. I heartily bless all of you, your parents, your grandparents, your

families! And please, do not forget your grandparents! May no-one remain alone during these days.

And I wish you all a good Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. May the Lord bless you. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci*!
