



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today – Feast of Saint Stephen, First Martyr – the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with the approximately 25 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 feast day! Happy feast day to everyone.

Today, immediately after Christmas, the liturgy celebrates Saint Stephen, the first martyr. The account of his stoning is found in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 6:8-12; 7:54-60) and presents it to us while, dying, he prays for his killers. And this gives us pause for thought: in fact, even though at first sight Stephen seems to be helplessly suffering violence, in reality, as a truly free man, he continues to love even his killers and to offer his life for them, like Jesus (cf. *Jn* 10:17-18; *Lk* 23:34); he offers his life so that they may repent and, having been forgiven, be given eternal life.

In this way, the deacon Stephen appears to us as a witness of that God who has one great desire: that "that all men be saved" (1 *Tim* 2:4) – this is the desire of God's heart – that no-one be lost (cf. *Jn* 6:39; 17:1-26). Stephen is a witness to the Father – our Father – who wants good and only good for each of His children, and always; the Father who excludes no one, the Father who never tires of seeking them out (cf. *Lk* 15:3-7) and of welcoming them back when, after having strayed, they return to Him in repentance (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32) and the Father who does not tire of forgiving. Remember this: God always forgives, and God forgives everything.

Let us return to Stephen. Unfortunately, even today there are, in various parts of the world, many men and women who are persecuted, at times up to death, because of the Gospel. What we have said about Stephen applies to them too. They do not allow themselves to be killed out of weakness, nor to defend an ideology, but to make everyone participants in the gift of salvation. And they do so first and foremost for the good of their killers: for the killers ... and they pray for them.

A beautiful example of this is left to us by Blessed Christian de Chergé, who called his future killer a “last minute friend

Let us ask ourselves, then, each one of us: do I feel the desire for all to know God and for everyone to be saved? Do I also want the good of those who make me suffer? Do I take an interest in and pray for the many brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith?

May Mary, Queen of Martyrs, help us to be courageous witnesses of the Gospel for the salvation of the world.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I reiterate to you all my wishes for a Holy Christmas. During these days I have received many messages and signs of closeness. Thank you. I wish to thank you all from my heart: every person, every family, the parishes and the associations. Thank you all!

Yesterday evening marked the beginning of the Feast of Lights, *Hanukkah*, celebrated for eight days by our Jewish brothers and sisters throughout the world, to whom I send my wish of peace and fraternity.

And I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims from Italy and various countries. I think that many of you have made the pilgrim journey that leads to the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica. It is a good sign, a sign that expresses the meaning of our life: going towards Jesus, who loves us and opens His Heart to let us enter into His Kingdom of love, joy and peace. This morning, I opened a Holy Door, after that of Saint Peter's, in the Roman Rebibbia prison. It was, so to speak, “the cathedral of pain and hope”.

One of the actions that characterizes Jubilees is the forgiving of debts. I therefore encourage everyone to support the *Caritas Internationalis* campaign entitled “Turn debt into hope”, to relieve countries oppressed by unsustainable debts and to promote development.

The question of debt is linked to that of peace and the “black market” of weapons. No more colonizing peoples with weapons! Let us work for disarmament, let us work against hunger, against disease, against child labour. And let us pray, please, for peace throughout the world! Peace in tormented Ukraine, in Gaza, Israel, Myanmar, North Kivu and in so many countries that are at war.

I wish everyone a beautiful day of celebration. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
