



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 250101d

Wednesday 01.01.2025

The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At the end of Holy Mass celebrated in the Vatican Basilica for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and the 58th World Day of Peace, Pope Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with the approximately thirty thousand faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

The following are his words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

Dear brothers and sisters, happy New Year!

The surprise and the joy of Christmas continue in today's Gospel (Lk 2:16-21), which narrates the arrival of the shepherds in the grotto in Bethlehem. Indeed, after the proclamation of the angels, "they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger" (v. 16). This encounter fills everyone with wonder, because the shepherds "made known the message that had been told them about this child" (v. 17): the newborn is the "saviour", the "Messiah", the "Lord" (v. 11)!

Let us reflect on what the shepherds saw in Bethlehem, namely, the *infant Jesus*, and also on what they did not see, that is, the *heart of Mary*, who kept and reflected on all these things (cf. v. 19).

First and foremost, the *infant Jesus*: this Hebrew name means "God saves", and this is precisely what He will do. Indeed, the Lord came into the world to give us His very life. Let us think about this: all men are sons, but none of us chose to be born. Instead, God chose to be born for us. God chose. Jesus is the revelation of His eternal love, which brings peace into the world.

The *heart of Mary*, the Virgin Mother, corresponds to the newborn Messiah, who manifests the mercy of the Father. This heart is the ear that listened to the proclamation of the Archangel; this heart is the hand of the bride given to Joseph; this heart is the embrace that enveloped Elizabeth in her old age. Hope beats in the heart of Mary, Our Mother; hope beats for the redemption and salvation of every creature.

Mothers! Mothers always have their children at heart. Today, on this first day of the year, dedicated to peace, let us think of all the mothers who rejoice in their heart, and of all the mothers who have a heart full of suffering, because their children have been taken away by violence, by arrogance, by hatred. How beautiful is peace! And how inhuman is war, which breaks the hearts of mothers!

In the light of these reflections, we can each ask ourselves: do I know how to remain in silence to contemplate the birth of Jesus? And do I try to cherish in my heart this Advent, its message of goodness and salvation? And how can I reciprocate such a great gift with a gratuitous gesture of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation? Each one of us will find something to do, and this will do us good.

May Mary, the Holy Mother of God, teach us to keep the joy of the Gospel in our hearts and bear witness to it in the world.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

To all of you, Romans and pilgrims, and those who are following along via the media, I wish you all the best for the new year. I thank the President of the Italian Republic for the remembrance in his message to the Nation, and I warmly reciprocate, assuring him of my prayer. Happy new year, Mr. President!

Pope Saint Paul VI wanted the first day of the year to become World Day of Peace. This year it is characterized, due to the Jubilee, by a particular theme: the forgiveness of debts. The first to forgive debts is God, as we always ask Him when we pray the Lord's Prayer, referring to our sins and committing ourselves to forgive in turn those who have offended us. And the Jubilee asks us to translate this forgiveness on a social level, so that no person, no family, no population is crushed by debts. I therefore encourage the rulers of countries with a Christian tradition to set a good example by cancelling or reducing as much as possible the debts of the poorest countries.

I give thanks for all the prayer initiatives and commitment to peace promoted all over the world by diocesan and parish communities, associations, and ecclesial movements and groups, such as the national March for Peace which took place yesterday in Pesaro. And I greet the participants in the "Peace in All Lands" event organized by the Sant'Egidio Community in various countries. I greet the Sant'Egidio Community, which is there.

I express my grateful appreciation to all those in the many areas of conflict who work for dialogue and negotiations. Let us pray that the fighting will cease on every front, and that there will be a decisive effort for peace and reconciliation. I am thinking of tormented Ukraine, Gaza, Israel, Myanmar, Kivu and so many peoples at war. I saw, on the programme "A Sua Immagine", footage and photographs of the destruction wrought by war. Brothers, sisters, war destroys, it always destroys! War is always a defeat, always.

I warmly greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims, in particular the musical bands of some schools in the United States of America: from Michigan, California, Oklahoma and North Carolina. Thank you for your music! I also greet the faithful of Pontevedra, in Spain, and the volunteers of the *Fraterna Domus*. And I greet the young people of the *Immacolata*: fight for peace!

I wish you all a good start to the year, with the blessing of the Lord and the Virgin Mary. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*

