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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At the end of the Mass for the Congolese Catholic community in Rome, celebrated in the Vatican Basilica on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the chaplaincy of the Congolese Catholic community in Rome, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with the faithful and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

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

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today, the first Sunday of the time of Advent, a new liturgical year begins. In these four weeks of Advent, the liturgy leads us to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus, while it reminds us that He comes into our lives every day, and will return gloriously at the end of time. This certainty leads us to look trustfully to the future, as we are invited to do by the prophet Isaiah, who with his inspired voice accompanies the entire Advent journey.

In today's first reading, Isaiah prophesies that "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it" (Is 2: 2). The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is presented as the point of convergence and meeting of all peoples. After the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Himself revealed himself as the true temple. Therefore, the marvellous vision of Isaiah is a divine promise and impels us to assume an attitude of pilgrimage, of a journey towards Christ, the meaning and end of all history. Those who hunger and thirst for justice can only find it through the ways of the Lord, while evil and sin come from the fact that individuals and social groups prefer to follow paths dictated by selfish interests, which cause conflicts and wars. Advent is the time to welcome the coming of Jesus, Who comes as a messenger of peace to show us the ways of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to be ready for His coming: "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Mt 24: 42). Staying awake does not mean to have one's eyes materially open, but to have one's heart free and facing the right direction, that is disposed to giving and to service. This is staying awake! The slumber from which we must awaken is constituted of indifference, of vanity, of the inability to establish genuinely human relationships, of the inability to take charge of our brother who is alone, abandoned or ill. The expectation of Jesus Who is coming must therefore be translated into a commitment to vigilance. It is above all a question of wondering at God's action, at His surprises, and of according Him primacy. Vigilance also means, in a concrete sense, being attentive to our neighbour in difficulty, allowing oneself to be called upon by his needs, without waiting for him or her to ask us for help, but learning to prevent, to anticipate, as God always does with us.

May Mary, the vigilant Virgin and Mother of hope, guide us on this journey, helping us to turn our gaze towards the "mountain of the Lord", the image of Jesus Christ, which attracts all men and all peoples.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I follow with concern the situation in Iraq. I have learned with sorrow that the protest demonstrations of recent days have met with a harsh reaction, claiming dozens of victims. I pray for the deceased and for the wounded; I am close to their families and the entire Iraqi population, invoking peace and harmony from God.

The Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life has instituted a new *International Youth Advisory Body*, made up of twenty young people from different geographical and ecclesial origins. It is a concrete answer to the solicitation of the Synod dedicated to young people last year (cf. *Final Document*, 123). The task of this Body is to help understand the viewpoint of young people on the priorities of youth ministry and on other issues of more general interest. Let us pray for this.

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims from various countries! In particular, the faithful from Poland and the children's choir from Bucharest.

I greet the groups from Giulianova Lido, Nettuno and Jesi; as well as the pilgrims from Cavarzere with the "Serafin" choir, and the Association of Romanians in Italy.

This afternoon I will go to Greccio, the place where Saint Francis made the first nativity scene. There I will sign a Letter on the meaning and value of the crèche. The crèche is a simple and wonderful sign of the Christian faith. It is a short Letter, which can help us prepare for Christmas. Prayerfully accompany me on this journey.

I wish you all a good Sunday and a good Advent journey. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and *arrivederci*.
