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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 faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

The following is the introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good afternoon!

Today's liturgical feast celebrates one of the wonders of the story of salvation: the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Even she was saved by Christ, but in an extraordinary way, because God wanted that the mother of His Son not be touched by the misery of sin from the moment of her conception. And so, for the entire course of her earthly life, Mary was free from any stain of sin, she was the "full of grace" (*Lk 1:28*), as the angel called her. She was favoured by a singular action of the Holy Spirit so as to always remain in perfect relationship with her Son, Jesus. Rather, she was Jesus's disciple: His Mother and disciple. But there was no sin in her.

In the magnificent hymn that opens the Letter to the Ephesians (see 1:3-6, 11-12), St Paul makes us understand that every human being is created by God for that fullness of holiness, for that beauty of which the Madonna was clothed from the beginning. The goal to which we are called is also a gift of God for us, for which, the Apostles says He "chose us before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish" (v. 4); He predestined us (see v. 5), in Christ to be totally free from sin one day. And this is grace, it is gratuitous, it is a gift of God.

And what Mary had from the beginning, will be ours in the end, after we have passed through the purifying "bath" of God's grace. What opens the gates of paradise to us is God's grace, received by us with faithfulness. Even the most innocent were, nevertheless, marked by original sin and fought with all their strength against its consequences. They passed through the "narrow door" that leads to life (see *Lk 13:24*). And do you know who is

the first person we are sure entered paradise? Do you know who? A “ruffian”: one of the two who was crucified with Jesus. And he turned to Jesus saying: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”. And He responded: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (*Lk 23:42-43*). Brothers and sisters, God’s grace is offered to everyone; and many who are the least on this earth will be the first in heaven (see *Mk 10:31*).

But be careful. It does not pay to be clever – to continually postpone a serious evaluation of one’s own life, taking advantage of the Lord’s patience. He is patient. He waits for us, He is always ready to give us grace. We may be able to deceive people, but not God; He knows our hearts better than we ourselves do. Let us take advantage of the present moment! This, yes, is the Christian sense of seizing the day. To not enjoy life in each passing moment – no, this is the worldly sense. But to seize today, to say “no” to evil and “yes” to God, to open oneself to His grace, to once and for all stop thinking of ourselves, dragging ourselves into hypocrisy and to face our own reality as we are –this is who we are – to recognize that we have not loved God and neighbour as we should have. And to confess it, this is the beginning of a journey of conversion, asking God’s pardon first of all in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and then to repair the harm done to others. But always open to grace: the Lord knocks on our door, He knocks on our heart to enter into friendship with us, in communion, to give us salvation.

And this, for us, is the path for becoming “holy and immaculate”. The uncontaminated beauty of our Mother is incomparable, but at the same time it attracts us. Let us entrust ourselves to her and say “no” to sin and “yes” to Grace once and for all.

After the Angelus

I greet all of you, members of the faithful from Rome, and pilgrims from various countries, and I greet the “Immacolata” group, today, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception: they are great, they are always here!

Today, members of the Italian Catholic Action renew their commitment to the Association. I extend my greeting to you and wish you all the best. I pray as well that Christ may be formed in you, as St Paul wrote, and that you may be artisans of fraternity.

I greet the representatives of the city of Rocca di Papa who today, according to tradition, will light the Christmas star on the city’s fortress. May the light of Christ always illuminate your community.

As you know, this afternoon the traditional veneration of the Immaculate Conception in Piazza di Spagna will not take place, to avoid the risk of a crowd gathering, as disposed by the civil authorities, whom we need to obey. But this does not keep us from offering our Mother the flowers that she enjoys the most: prayer, penance, a heart open to grace.

Nonetheless, early this morning, I went privately to Piazza di Spagna and then to St Mary Major where I celebrated Mass.

I wish everyone a Happy Feast Day. And, please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
