



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. 201214a

Sunday 13.12.2020

The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, third Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete Sunday*), 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.

This year, due to the healthcare situation, the children of the diocese of Rome were not present in Saint Peter's Square for the customary blessing of the figurines of the Baby Jesus.

The following is the introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The invitation to joy is characteristic of the season of Advent: the expectation of Jesus' birth that we experience is joyful, somewhat like when we await the visit of a person we love a great deal, for example, a friend whom we have not seen for a long time, a relative.... We are in joyful anticipation. And this dimension of joy emerges particularly today, the Third Sunday, which opens with Saint Paul's exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Entrance Antiphon; cf. Phil 4:4, 5). "Rejoice!" Christian joy. And what is the reason for this joy? That "the Lord is at hand" (v. 5). The closer the Lord is to us, the more joy we feel; the farther away he is, the more sadness we feel. This is a rule for Christians. Once a philosopher said something more or less like this: "I do not understand how one can believe today, because those who say they believe have a face from a funeral wake. They do not bear witness of the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ". Many Christians have that face, yes, a face from a funeral wake, a face of sadness.... But Christ is risen! Christ loves you! And you have no joy? Let us think a bit about this and let us ask: "Do I have joy because the Lord is close to me, because the Lord loves me, because the Lord has redeemed me?".

The Gospel according to John today presents us the biblical character who – excluding Our Lady and Saint

Joseph – first and most fully experienced the expectation of the Messiah and *the joy of seeing him arrive*: naturally, we are speaking of John the Baptist (cf. Jn 1:6-8, 19-28).

The Evangelist introduces him in a solemn way: “There was a man sent from God.... He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light” (vv. 6-7). The Baptist is the first *witness* of Jesus, with the word and with the gift of his life. All the Gospels agree in showing that he fulfilled his mission by indicating Jesus as the Christ, the One sent by God, promised by the Prophets. John was a leader of his time. His renown had spread throughout Judea and beyond, to Galilee. But he did not surrender even for an instant to the temptation to draw attention to himself: he always oriented himself toward the One who was to come. He used to say: “he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie” (v. 27). Always indicating the Lord. Like Our Lady: always indicating the Lord: “Do whatever he tells you”. The Lord is always at the centre. The Saints around him, indicating the Lord. And one who does not indicate the Lord is not holy! This is the first condition of Christian joy: to *decentralize from oneself and place Jesus at the centre*. This is not alienation, because Jesus *is* effectively *the centre*; he is the *light* that gives full meaning to the life of every man and woman who comes into this world. It is the same dynamism of love, which leads me to come out of myself not to lose myself but to find myself again, while I give myself, while I seek the good of others.

John the Baptist undertook *a long journey* to come to bear witness to Jesus. The journey of joy is not a walk in the park. It takes work to always be joyful. John left everything, in his youth, to put God in first place, to listen to His Word with all his heart and all his strength. John withdrew into the desert, stripping himself of all things superfluous, in order to be freer to follow the wind of the Holy Spirit. Of course, some of his personality traits are unique, unrepeatable; they cannot be recommended for everyone. But his witness is paradigmatic for whoever wishes to seek the meaning of his or her life and find true joy. In particular, the Baptist is a model for those in the Church who are called to proclaim Christ to others: they are able to do so only by detaching from themselves and from worldliness, by not attracting people to themselves but directing them toward Jesus.

This is joy: directing toward Jesus. And joy must be the characteristic of our faith. And in dark moments, that inner joy, of knowing that the Lord is with me, that the Lord is with us, that the Lord is Risen. The Lord! The Lord! The Lord! This is the centre of our life, and this is the centre of our joy. Think well today: how do I behave? Am I a joyful person who knows how to transmit the joy of being Christian, or am I always like those sad people, as I said before, who seem to be at a funeral wake? If I do not have the joy of my faith, I cannot bear witness and others will say: “But if faith is so sad, it is better not to have it”.

By praying the *Angelus* now, we see all of this fully realized in the Virgin Mary: she silently awaited God's Word of salvation; she welcomed it; she listened to it; she conceived it. In her, God became *close*. This is why the Church calls Mary a “Cause of our joy”.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, I greet you all, people of Rome and pilgrims.

In a special way I greet the group that has come as representatives of the families and children of Rome, for the occasion of the blessing of the “Baby Jesus” figurines, an event organized by the *Centro Oratori Romani*. This year few of you are here due to the pandemic, but I know that many children and young people have gathered in the youth centres and in their homes and are following us via means of communication. I offer my greeting to everyone and I bless the statuettes of Jesus, which will be placed in the Nativity scene, a sign of hope and joy. In silence, let us bless the Baby Jesus figurines: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. When you pray at home, before the Nativity scene with your families, allow yourselves to be drawn by the *tenderness* of Baby Jesus, born poor and frail among us, in order to give us his love.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday. Do not forget joy! Christians are joyful at heart, even in trials. They are joyful because they are close to Jesus: it is He who gives us joy. And, please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your

lunch. *Arrivederci!*
