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The Pope's words at the Regina Caeli prayer

At midday today, Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Holy Father Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Regina Caeli with the faithful and pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

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

Before the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

On this Fourth Sunday of Easter, called Good Shepherd Sunday, the Gospel (*Jn* 10:11-18) presents Jesus as the true shepherd who *defends*, *knows* and *loves* his sheep.

The "mercenary" is the opposite of the Good Shepherd, the one who does not care about the sheep because they are not his. He does the job only for pay and is not concerned about defending them: when a wolf arrives, he flees and abandons them (cf vv. 12-13). Instead, Jesus, the true shepherd, *defends* us always and saves us from so many difficult situations, dangerous situations through the light of his word and the strength of his presence that we always experience if we want to listen, every day.

The second aspect is that Jesus, the good shepherd, *knows* – the first aspect: *defend*; the second: *he knows* his sheep and the sheep know Him (v. 14). How beautiful and consoling it is to know that Jesus knows us one by one, that we are not unknown to Him, that our name is known to him! We are not a "mass", a "multitude" for Him, no. We are unique individuals, each with his or her own story, he knows us with our own story, each with his or her own value, both because they have been created and have been redeemed by Christ. Each of us can say: Jesus, knows me! Each one of us: Jesus knows me! It is true, it is like this: He knows us like no other. Only He knows what is in our hearts, our intentions, our most hidden feelings. Jesus knows our strengths and our defects, and is always ready to care for us, to heal the wounds of our errors with the abundance of his mercy. In Him, the image the prophets had provided of the shepherd of the people of God is completely fulfilled: Jesus is

concerned about his sheep, he gathers them, he binds their wounds, he heals their ailments. We can read this in Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (cf *Ez* 34:11-16).

Therefore, Jesus the Good Shepherd defends, knows, and above all *loves* his sheep. And this is why He gives His life for them (cf *Jn* 10:15). Love for his sheep, that is, for each one of us, would lead him to die on the cross. For this is the Father's will – that no one should be lost. Christ's love is not selective; it embraces everyone. He Himself reminds us of this in today's Gospel when he says: "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (*Jn* 10:16). These words testify to his universal concern: He is everyone's shepherd. Jesus wants everyone to be able to receive the Father's love and encounter God.

And the Church is called to carry on this mission of Christ. Beyond those who participate in our communities, there is the majority, many people, who do so only at particular moments or never. But this does not mean they are not God's children: the Father entrusts everyone to Jesus the Good Shepherd, and he gave his life for everyone.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus *defends, knows* and *loves* us, everyone. May Mary Most Holy help us to be the first to welcome and follow the Good Shepherd, to cooperate in the joy of his mission.

After the Regina Caeli

Dear brothers and sisters,

This past Friday, in Santa Cruz de Quiché in Guatemala, José Maria Gran Cirera and nine martyr companions were beatified: three priests and seven lay people belonging to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, committed to defending the poor, who were killed between 1980 and 1991, the time during which the Catholic Church was being persecuted. With lively faith in Christ, they were heroic witnesses of justice and love. May their example make us more generous and courageous in living the Gospel. Let's give a round of applause for the new Blessed. [Applause]

I express my nearness to the people living on the Islands of St Vincent and the Grenadines where the volcanic eruption is causing harm and difficulties. I assure you of my prayers. I bless all those who are participating in relief efforts and assistance.

I am also near to the victims of the fire in the hospital for Covid patients in Baghdad. As of now, there are 82 people who have died. Let us pray for all of them.

I confess I am extremely sad over the tragedy that has once again taken place in the Mediterranean. One hundred thirty migrants died in the sea. They are people. They are human beings who begged for help in vain for two whole days – help that never arrived. Brothers and sisters, let us all ask ourselves about this umpteenth tragedy. It is a shameful moment. Let us pray for these brothers and sisters, and for all those who continue to die in these tragic crossings. Let us also pray for those who can help but prefer to look the other way. Let us pray in silence for them....

Today, the entire Church celebrates the World Day of Prayer for Vocations whose theme is Saint Joseph: the Dream of Vocation. Let us thank the Lord so that he might continue to raise up in the Church people who, for love of Him, consecrate themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel and service to their brothers and sisters. And today in particular, let us offer thanks for the nine priests that I ordained earlier in Saint Peter's Basilica – I do not know if they are here – and let us ask the Lord to send good labourers to work in his vineyard and that he might multiply vocations to the consecrated life.

And now I wholeheartedly greet you all of you, people from Rome and pilgrims. In particular, I greet the families and friends of the newly-ordained priests, as well as the community of the Pontifical German-Hungarian College who performed the traditional pilgrimage of the seven Churches today.

I wish all of you a good Sunday. And please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. Arrivederci!
