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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

Following the celebration of Holy Mass on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord with the rite of Baptism of babies, at midday 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 are the Pope's words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

The Gospel of today's Liturgy shows us the scene with which Jesus' public life begins: he, who is the Son of God and the Messiah, goes to the banks of the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. After about thirty years of hidden life, Jesus does not present himself with a miracle, or by rising to the podium to teach. He lines up with the people who were going to receive baptism from John. Today's liturgical hymn says that the people went to be baptized with a bare soul and bare feet, humbly. This is a beautiful attitude, with a bare soul and bare feet. And Jesus shares the plight of us sinners, he *comes down* towards us; he descends into the river, and at the same time into the wounded history of humanity, he immerses himself in our waters to heal them, and he immerses himself with us, in our midst. He does not rise up above us, but rather comes down towards us with a bare soul, with bare feet, like the people. He does not come by himself, nor does he come with a select, privileged group. No: he comes with the people. He belongs to the people and he comes with them to be baptized, with these humble people.

Let us reflect on an important point: at the moment in which Jesus receives Baptism, the text says that he "was praying" (Lk 3:21). It is good for us to contemplate this: Jesus prays. But why? He, the Lord, the Son of God, prays like us? Yes, Jesus – the Gospels repeat this many times – spends a lot of time in prayer: at the beginning of every day, often at night, before making important decisions... His prayer is a dialogue, a relationship with the Father. Thus, in today's Gospel, we can see the "two moments" in the life of Jesus: on the one hand, he

descends towards us into the waters of the Jordan; on the other, he *raises* his eyes and his heart, praying to the Father.

It is a tremendous lesson for us: we are all immersed in the problems of life and in many complicated situations, called upon to face difficult moments and choices that get us down. But, if we do not want to be crushed, we need to raise everything upwards. And this is exactly what prayer does. It is not an escape route; prayer is not a magic ritual or a repetition of memorized jingles. No. Prayer is the way we allow God to act in us, to understand what he wants to communicate to us even in the most difficult situations, prayer is having the strength to go forward. Many people feel they can't go on, and pray: "Lord, give me the strength to continue". We too, very often, have done this. Prayer helps us because it unites us to God, it opens us up to encountering him. Yes, prayer is the key that opens our heart to the Lord. It is dialoguing with God, it is listening to his Word, it is worshipping: remaining in silence, entrusting to him what we are experiencing. And at times it is also crying out with him like Job, other times it is venting with Him. Crying out like Job; He is the father, He understands well. He never gets angry with us. And Jesus prays.

Prayer – to use a beautiful image from today's Gospel – "opens the heavens" (cf. v. 21). Prayer opens the heavens: it gives life oxygen, a breath of fresh air amidst life's troubles and allows us to see things from a broader perspective. Above all, it enables us to have the same experience of Jesus by the Jordan River: it makes us feel like beloved children of the Father. When we pray, the Father says to us too, as he does to Jesus in the Gospel: "You are my beloved child" (cf. v. 22). Being God's children began on the day of our Baptism, which immersed us in Christ and, as members of the people of God, we became beloved children of the Father. Let us not forget the date of our Baptism! If I were to ask each one of you now: what is the date of your Baptism? Perhaps some of you don't remember. This is a beautiful thing: remembering the date of your baptism, because it is our rebirth, the moment in which we became children of God with Jesus! And when you return home – if you don't know – ask your mother, your aunt, your grandmother or your grandfather: "When was I baptized?", and remember that date so as to celebrate it, to thank the Lord. And today, at this moment, let us ask ourselves: how is my prayer going? Do I pray out of habit, do I pray unwillingly, just reciting formulas, or is my prayer an encounter with God? I, a sinner, always with the people of God, never isolated? Do I cultivate intimacy with God, dialogue with Him, listen to his Word? Among the many things we do each day, let us not neglect prayer: let us dedicate time to it, let us use short invocations to be repeated often, let us read the Gospel every day. The prayer that opens the heavens.

And now, let us turn to Our Lady, the prayerful Virgin, who made her life into a hymn in praise of God.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I have learned with sorrow that there have been victims during the protests that have broken out in recent days in Kazakhstan. I pray for them and for their families, and I hope that social harmony will be restored as soon as possible through the search for dialogue, justice and the common good. I entrust the Kazakh people to the protection of Our Lady, Queen of Peace of Oziornoje.

And I greet you all heartily, faithful of Rome and pilgrims from Italy and other countries. In particular I greet the group from Frattamaggiore, near Naples.

This morning, as is customary on the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord, I baptized some children of Vatican employees. I now wish to extend my prayer and blessing to all the infants who have received or will receive Baptism during this period. May the Lord bless them and may Our Lady protect them.

And to all of you, do not forget: learn the date of your Baptism. When was I baptized? You must not forget this,

and remember that day as a day of celebration.

I wish you all a blessed Sunday. Please don't forget to pray for me. Enjoy your meal, and *arrivederci*.
