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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, 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 takes us to the banks of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd is gathering around Jesus, while some disappointed fishermen, including Simon Peter, are washing their nets after a night of fishing that went badly. And so it is that Jesus climbs into Simon's boat; then he invites him to go out to sea and cast his nets again (cf. *Lk 5:1-4*). Let us pause on these two actions of Jesus: first he climbs into the boat and then, the second, he invites him to put out into the open water. It was a night that went badly, without fish, but Peter is trustful and sets out into open water.

First of all, Jesus gets into Simon's boat. To do what? To teach. He asks for that very boat, which is not full of fish but rather has returned to the shore empty, after a night of toil and disillusionment. It is a beautiful image for us too. Every day the boat of our life leaves the shores of our home to sail out into the sea of daily activities; every day we try to "fish from the sea", to cultivate dreams, to pursue projects, to experience love in our relationships. But often, like Peter, we experience the "night of empty nets" – the night of empty nets – the disappointment of trying so hard and not seeing the desired results: "We toiled all night and took nothing" (v. 5), says Simon. How often we too are left with a sense of defeat, while disappointment and bitterness arise in our hearts. Two very dangerous woodworms.

What does the Lord do then? He chooses to climb into our boat. From there he wants to proclaim the Gospel. It is precisely that empty boat, the symbol of our incapacity, that becomes Jesus' "cathedra", the pulpit from which he proclaims the Word. And this is what the Lord loves to do – the Lord is the Lord of surprises, of miracles in surprises: to climb into the boat of our lives when we have nothing to offer him; to enter our voids and fill them

with his presence; to make use of our poverty to proclaim his wealth, our miseries to proclaim his mercy. Let us remember this: God does not want a cruise ship: a poor “ramshackle” boat is enough for him, as long as we welcome him. This yes, to welcome him; the boat doesn’t matter, but that we welcome him. But, I wonder, do we let him into the boat of our lives? Do we make available to him the little we have? Sometimes we feel unworthy of Him because we are sinners. But this is an excuse that the Lord does not like, because it distances Him from us! He is the God of closeness, compassion, tenderness, and he does not seek perfectionism: he seeks our welcome. He says to you too: “Let me get into the boat of your life”, “But Lord, look..” – “Like that, let me in, just as it is”. Think about this.

In this way, the Lord reconstructs Peter’s trust. When he climbs into the boat, after preaching, he says: “Put out a little from the land” (v. 4). It was not a good time of the day for fishing, in broad daylight, but Peter trusts in Jesus. He does not base his trust on the strategies of fishermen, which he knows well, but rather he finds it on the newness of Jesus. That wonder that moved him to do what Jesus told him. It is the same for us too: if we welcome the Lord into our boat, we can put out to sea. With Jesus, we navigate the sea of life without fear, without giving in to disappointment when we catch nothing, and without giving up and saying “there is nothing more to be done”. Always, in personal life as well as in the life of the Church and society, there is something beautiful and courageous that can be done, always. We can always start again – the Lord always invites us to get back on our feet because He opens up new possibilities. So let us accept the invitation: let us chase away pessimism and mistrust, and *put out to sea* with Jesus! Our little empty boat, too, will witness a miraculous catch.

Let us pray to Mary: who like no other welcomed the Lord into the boat of her life. May she encourage us and intercede for us.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today is the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. Approximately three million girls undergo this operation every year, often in conditions that are very dangerous to their health. This practice, unfortunately widespread in various regions of the world, demeans the dignity of women and gravely undermines their physical integrity.

And next Tuesday, liturgical memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, we will celebrate the *World Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking*. This is a deep wound, inflicted by the shameful pursuit of economic interests without any respect for the human person. So many girls – we see them on the streets – who are not free, are slaves of traffickers, who send them to work and, if they do not bring the money, beat them. This is happening in our cities today. Let us really think about it.

Faced with these scourges of humanity, I express my sorrow and I urge all those with responsibility to act decisively to prevent both exploitation and the humiliating practices that afflict women and girls in particular.

Today, in Italy, it is also the Day for Life, on the theme “Protect every life”. This appeal is valid for everyone, especially for the most vulnerable categories: the elderly, the sick, and even children who are prevented from being born. I join the Italian bishops in promoting the culture of life as a response to the logic of rejection and to the demographic decline. Every life must be preserved, always!

We are used to seeing and reading in the media so many bad things, bad news, accidents, murders... so many things. But today I would like to mention two beautiful things. One, in Morocco, how all the people gathered together to save Rayan. It was all the people there, working to save a child! They put everything they had into it. Unfortunately, he did not make it. But that example - I was reading in *Il Messaggero* today - those photographs

of the people there, waiting to save a child.... Thank you to these people for this testimony!

And another one, which happened here in Italy, and will not appear in the newspaper. In Monferrato: John, a Ghanaian boy, 25 years old, a migrant, who suffered everything that many migrants suffer to get here, and in the end he settled in Monferrato, he started to work, to make his future, in a wine company. And then he fell ill with a terrible cancer; he is dying. And when they told him the truth, what he would have liked to do, [he replied:] "To go back home to embrace my father before dying". As he was dying, he thought of his father. And in that village in Monferrato, they immediately took up the collection and, medicated with morphine, they put him and a companion on a plane and sent him home so that he could die in his father's arms. This shows us that today, in the midst of so much bad news, there are good things, there are "saints next door". Thank you for these two testimonies which are good for us.

I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims! In particular, those from Germany, Poland and Valencia, Spain, as well as the university students from Madrid – they are noisy, those Spanish students! – and the faithful of the parish of Saint Francis of Assisi in Rome. A special greeting goes to the women religious of the group *Talitha Kum*, who are working against human trafficking. Thank you for what you do, for your courage. Thank you. I encourage you in your work and I bless the statue of Saint Josephine Bakhita.

And I wish you all a blessed Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci*.
