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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!*

We are at the heart of our Lenten journey, and today the Gospel begins by presenting Jesus who comments on some news of the day. While people still remember the eighteen who died when a tower collapsed on them, they tell Him about some Galileans whom Pilate had killed (cf. *Lk 13:1*). And there is a question that seems to accompany these tragic affairs: who is to blame for these terrible events? Perhaps those people were guiltier than others and God punished them? These are questions that also come up today. When bad news weighs on us and we feel powerless before evil, we often ask ourselves: is it perhaps a punishment from God? Did He bring about a war or a pandemic to punish us for our sins? And why does the Lord not intervene?

We must be careful: when evil oppresses us, we risk losing our clarity and, to find an easy answer to what we are unable to explain, we end up putting the blame on God. And so often the very bad habit of using profanities comes from this. How often we attribute to Him our woes and misfortunes in the world, to Him who instead leaves us always free and hence never intervenes imposing, but only proposing; He who never uses violence and instead suffers for us and with us! Indeed, Jesus refuses and contests strongly the idea of blaming God for our evils: those persons who were killed by Pilate and those who died when the tower collapsed on them were not any more at fault than others, and they were not victims of a ruthless and vindictive God, which does not exist! Evil can never come from God because "He does not deal with us according to our sins" (*Ps 103:10*), but according to His mercy. This is God's style. He cannot treat us otherwise. He always treats us with mercy.

Rather than blaming God, Jesus says we need to look inside ourselves: it is sin that produces death; our selfishness can tear apart relationships; our wrong and violent choices can unleash evil. At this point the Lord offers the true solution, and that is conversion: He says, "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (*Lk 13:5*). It is an urgent call, especially during this time of Lent. Let us welcome it with an open heart. Let us turn from evil, let us renounce the sin that seduces us, let us be open to the logic of the Gospel because where love and fraternity reign, evil has no more power!

But Jesus knows that conversion is not easy, and he wants to help us here, given that so many times we repeat the same mistakes and the same sins. We can become discouraged, and sometimes our commitment to do good can seem useless in a world where evil seems to rule. So, after his appeal, He encourages us with a parable that tells of the patience God has for us. We must keep in mind God's patience that He has for us. He offers the consoling image of fig tree that does not bear fruit during the accorded season, but it is not cut down. He gives it more time, another possibility. I like thinking that a nice name for God could be "the God of another possibility": God always gives us another opportunity, always, always. That is what His mercy is like. This is how the Lord works with us. He does not cut us out of his love. He does not lose heart or tire of offering us again His trust with tenderness. Brothers and sisters, God believes in us! God trusts us and accompanies us with patience, the patience of God with us. He does not get discouraged, but always instills hope in us. God is Father and looks after you like a father. As the best of fathers, He does not look at the achievements you have not yet reached, but the fruits you can still bear. He does not keep track of your shortcomings but encourages your potential. He does not dwell on your past, but confidently bets on your future. This is because God is close to us. Let us not forget that the style of God is closeness, He is close with mercy and tenderness. In this way God accompanies us: with closeness, mercy, and tenderness.

So let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to fill us with hope and courage, and kindle in us the desire for conversion.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Unfortunately, the violent aggression against Ukraine does not stop, a senseless massacre where every day there is a repetition of slaughter and atrocities. There is no justification for this! I plead with all those involved in the international community to truly commit to ending this abhorrent war.

This week again missiles and bombs have fallen on civilians, the elderly, children, and pregnant mothers. I went to see the wounded children who are here in Rome. One was missing an arm; one had a head injury...innocent children. I think of the millions of Ukrainian refugees who must flee leaving everything behind, and I feel a great pain for those who do not even have the possibility to escape. So many grandparents, sick and poor people separated from their own families, so many children and fragile people are left to die under the bombs without being able to receive help and find safety even in the air raid shelters. All this is inhuman! Indeed, it is also sacrilegious because it goes against the sacredness of human life, especially against defenseless human life, which must be respected and protected, not eliminated, and this comes before any strategy! Let us not forget it is inhuman and sacrilegious cruelty! Let us pray in silence for those who are suffering.

It comforts me to know that the people left under the bombs do not lack the closeness of their pastors, who in these tragic days are living the Gospel of charity and fraternity. I have spoken with some of them on the phone during these days, they are close to the people of God. Thank you, dear brothers and sisters, for this witness and for the concrete support you are offering courageously to so many desperate people! I also think of the apostolic nuncio, who was just made a nuncio, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, who since the beginning of the war has stayed in Kyiv together with his collaborators and who with his presence brings me close every day to the martyred Ukrainian people. Let us be close to this people, let us embrace them with affection, with concrete commitment and prayer. And please, let us not get used to war and violence! Let us not tire of welcoming them with generosity as we are doing now not only during the emergency, but also in the weeks and months to come.

As you know at first, we do all we can to welcome everyone, but then we can get used to it, and our hearts cool a bit, and we forget about it. Let us think of these women and children who in time, without work, separated from their husbands, will be sought out by the 'vultures' of society. Please, let us protect them.

I invite every community and all the faithful to unite with me on Friday 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, for the Solemn Act of Consecration of humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that she, the Queen of Peace, may help us obtain peace.

I greet all of you, Romans and pilgrims who have come from Italy and various countries. In particular, I greet the faithful from Madrid, the international group "Agorà degli abitanti della terra", the doctors and rescuers of the 118 Emergency Service, the Rinnovamento Carismatico Cattolico "Charis" – the only one officially recognized, "Charis", not others -, and the members of the Focolari Movement. I greet the Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano di Bologna choir with the band from the Polizia di Stato, the "Ensemble Vox Cordis" choir of Fornovo San Giovanni, the "San Vincenzo Grossi" choir of Pizzighettone, the young people of the profession of faith of Angera, Sesto Calende e Ternate, the pilgrimage of the Diocese of Asti, and the faithful from Venice and Sassari.

I wish all of you a good Sunday. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and *arrivederci*.
