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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!*

The Gospel for today's Liturgy speaks to us about the bond that exists between the Lord and each one of us (cf. Jn 10:27-30). In doing so, Jesus uses a tender image, a beautiful image of the shepherd who stays with the sheep. And he explains it with three verbs: "My sheep", Jesus says, "*hear* my voice, and I *know* them, and they *follow* me" (v. 27). Three verbs: hear, know, follow. Let us take a look at these three verbs.

First of all, the sheep *hear* the voice of the shepherd. The initiative always comes from the Lord. Everything comes from his grace: it is he who calls us to communion with him. But this communion comes about if we open ourselves to listen. If we are deaf, he cannot grant us this communion. Open ourselves to listening, because listening implies availability, it implies docility, it implies time dedicated to dialogue. Today, we are inundated with words and by the urgency to always have something to say or do. How often two people are talking and the one does not wait for the other to finish his or her thought, but cuts the other off mid-sentence, and responds.... But if we do not allow another to speak, there is no listening. This is an ailment of our time. Today, we are inundated with words, by the urgency to always have something to say or do. We are afraid of silence. How hard it is to listen to each other! To listen till the end, to let the other express him or herself, to listen in our families, to listen at school, to listen at work, and even in the Church! But for the Lord, it is first of all necessary to listen. He is the Word of the Father, and the Christian is a *listening child*, called to live with the Word of God at hand. Let us ask ourselves today if we are listening children, if we find time for the Word of God, if we give space and attention to our brothers and sisters, if we know how to listen until the other has finished speaking, without cutting off what

the other is saying. Those who listen to others know how listen to the Lord, too, and vice versa. And they experience something very beautiful, that is, that the Lord himself listens – he listens to us when we pray to him, when we confide in him, when we call on him.

Listening to Jesus thus becomes the way for us to discover that he knows us. This is the second verb that concerns the good shepherd. He *knows* his sheep. But this does not only mean that he knows many things about us. To know in the biblical sense also means to love. It means that the Lord, “while he reads our inner beings,” loves us, he does not condemn us. If we listen to him, we discover this – that the Lord loves us. The way to discover the Lord’s love is to listen to him. Thus, our relationship with him will no longer be impersonal, cold or a front. Jesus is looking for a warm friendship, trust, intimacy. He wants to give us a new and marvelous awareness – that of knowing we are always loved by him and, therefore, that we are never left alone by ourselves. Being with the good shepherd allows us to live the experience what the Psalm speaks about: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; *for you are with me*” (*Ps 23:4*). He sustains us above all in our sufferings, in our difficulties, in our crises – which are dark – by going through them us. And so, it is specifically in difficult situations, that we can discover that we are known and loved by the Lord. So, let us ask ourselves: Do I let the Lord know me? Do I make room for him in my life? Do I bring what I am living to him? And what idea do I have of him after the many times I have experienced his closeness, his compassion, his tenderness? That the Lord is near, that the Lord is the good shepherd?

Lastly, the third verb: the sheep who hear, and who discover they are known, *follow*: they listen, they experience they are known by the Lord and they follow the Lord who is their shepherd. What do those who follow Christ do? They go where he goes, along the same path, in the same direction. They go to seek those who are lost (cf. *Lk 15:4*), are interested in those who are far-off, take to heart the situation of those who suffer, know how to weep with those who weep, they reach out their hands to their neighbour, placing him or her on their shoulders. And me? Do I let Jesus love me, and by allowing him to love me, do I pass from loving him to imitating him? May the Holy Virgin help us listen to Christ, know him always more and follow him on the way of service. Hearing him, knowing him, following him.

After the *Regina Caeli*

Dear brothers and sisters,

Yesterday, in San Ramon, Peru, María Agustina Rivas Lopez was beatified. Known as Aguchita, she was a woman religious of the Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd killed in hatred of the faith in 1990. While aware she was risking her life, this heroic missionary always remained near the poor, especially indigenous women and peasants, witnessing to the Gospel of justice and peace. May her example spark the desire in everyone to serve Christ faithfully and courageously. A round of applause for the new Blessed!

Today is the *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, whose theme is “Called to Build the Human Family”. May the Christian community on every continent pray to the Lord for the gift of vocations to the priesthood, to the consecrated life, to the choice of being a missionary, and to matrimony. This is the day on which, because of our baptism, we all feel called to follow Jesus, to say yes to him, to imitate him so as to discover the joy of giving one’s life, of serving the Gospel joyfully and enthusiastically. In this context, I want to extend my best wishes to the new priests of the Diocese of Rome who were ordained this morning in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran.

Right now, many members of the faithful are gathered around the image of Mary venerated in the Shrine of Pompei, to pray the *Supplication* that sprang from the heart of Blessed Bartolo Longo. Kneeling in spirit before the image of the Virgin, I entrust to her the ardent desire for peace of the many people in various parts of the world who suffer the senseless calamity of war. In particular, I present the sufferings and tears of the Ukrainian people to the Holy Virgin. Before the madness of war, please, let us continue to pray the Rosary for peace each day. And let us pray for the leaders of nations, so that they might not lose the “pulse of the people” who want peace and who know well that weapons never achieve it, never.

Let us also pray for the victims of the explosion that took place in a large hotel in the capital of Cuba, Havana. May the Risen Christ lead them to the Father's house and grant comfort to their relatives.

I greet all of you from Rome and pilgrims from Italy and many other countries. In particular, I greet the faithful from the United States of America, from Poland and from the Diocese of Nantes (France). I greet the Passionist Family, which celebrates the three hundredth Jubilee of foundation; those who are ill with fibromyalgia, whom I hope are receiving the necessary care; as well as the faithful from Naples, Pomigliano d'Arco, Reggio Calabria and Foggia; the children from the Confirmation class of Zogno (Bergamo), and those from San Ferdinando in Rome. A special greeting to the group of Ukrainian refugees and the families hosting them from Macchie, near Perugia. I also greet the leaders of the Sant'Egidio Community from Latin America.

Today is *Mother's Day* in many countries. Let us affectionately remember our mothers – a round of applause for our mothers – even those who are no longer with us down here, but who live in our hearts. Our prayer, our affection, and our best wishes for all our mothers.

A happy Sunday to all of you! Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch and arrivederci.
