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Angelus: Blessed are the poor in spirit

At midday today Pope Francis appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with around 25,000 faithful and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Among those present today were members of Youth Catholic Action of the diocese of Rome, having concluded their "Caravan of Peace", the month of January they traditionally dedicate to the theme of peace. At the end of the Marian prayer due of them, invited to the papal apartment, read a message on behalf of Youth Catholic Action Rome.

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The liturgy of this Sunday causes us to meditate on the Beatitudes (cf. Matthew 5:1-12a), which open the great "Sermon on the Mount", the *magna charta* of the New Testament. Jesus expresses the will of God to lead man to happiness. This message was already present in the preaching of the prophets: God is close to the poor and the oppressed and frees them from those who mistreat them. But in this sermon Jesus follows a particular route: He begins with the term "blessed", that is, "happy"; He continues by indicating the condition for being thus; and concludes by making a promise. The reason for beatitude, that is, happiness, does not reside in the condition required – for example, "poor in spirit", "afflicted", to "mourn", to "hunger and thirst for righteousness", to be "persecuted", but in the subsequent promise, to be received with faith as a gift from God. One begins from a condition of hardship so as to open up to the gift of God, and to enter the new world, the "Kingdom" proclaimed by Jesus. This is not an automatic mechanism, but rather a way of life following the Lord, so that the reality of hardship and affliction is seen from a new perspective and experienced according to the conversion undertaken. One cannot be blessed if one is not converted and able to appreciate and live the gifts of God.

I will look at the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 4). The poor in spirit are those who have assumed the sentiments and attitude of the poor who in their condition do not rebel, but know how to be humble, docile, open to the grace of God. The happiness of the poor – of the poor in spirit – has a twofold dimension: in relation to goods, and towards God. With regard to goods, to material goods,

this poverty in spirit is sobriety: not necessarily renunciation, but the capacity to enjoy the essential, sharing, the capacity to renew every day the wonder of the goodness of things, without being weighed down in the opacity of voracious consumption. And this kills the soul. The man or the woman who does this, who has this attitude, “the more I have, the more I want”, is not happy and will not attain happiness. In relation to God, it is praise and acknowledgement that the world is a blessing and that at its origin there is the creative love of the Father. But it is also openness to Him, docility to His lordship: He is the Lord, He is the Great One; I am not great because I have many things! It is He: He Who willed the world for all mankind and willed that mankind would thus be happy.

The poor in spirit is the Christian who does not trust in himself and in his material riches; who is not stubborn in his opinions but instead listens with respect and willingly defers to the decisions of others. If there were more poor in spirit in our communities, there would be fewer divisions, disputes and controversies! Humility, like charity, is an essential virtue for co-existence in Christian communities. The poor, in this evangelical sense, appear as those who keep alive the objective of the Kingdom of heaven, allowing us to glimpse that it is anticipated as a germ in fraternal community, that favours sharing to possession. I would like to underline this: favouring sharing over possession. Always having the heart and hands open, not closed. When the heart is closed, it is a restricted heart; it does not even know how to love. When the heart is open, it takes the path of love.

May the Virgin Mary, model and first fruit of the poor in spirit inasmuch as she is totally docile to the Lord’s will, help us abandon ourselves to God, rich in mercy, so that He may fill us with His gifts, especially the abundance of His forgiveness.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, as you see, the invaders have arrived ... they are here! Today we celebrate World Leprosy Day. This sickness, although in regression, is still among the most feared and strikes the poorest and most marginalised. It is important to combat this disease, and also the discrimination it engenders. I encourage all of those who are engaged in the care and social reintegration of those affected by Hansen’s disease, to whom we assure our prayers.

I greet with affection all of you from the various parishes of Italy and other countries, as well as associations and groups. In particular, I greet the students of Murcia and Badajoz, the young people of Bilbao and the faithful of Castellón. I greet pilgrims from Reggio Calabria, Castelliri, and the Sicilian group of the National Association of Parents. I would also like to renew my closeness to the populations of Central Italy, who still suffer the consequences of the earthquake and of difficult atmospheric conditions. May there be no lack of constant support from institutions and in common solidarity for these brothers and sisters of ours. And please, may they not be made to wait and to suffer further by any kind of bureaucracy.

I now turn to you, boys and girls of Catholic Action, of the parishes and Catholic schools of Rome. This year, accompanied by the cardinal vicar, you have come to the end of the “Caravan of Peace”, whose slogan is “Surrounded by Peace” – a beautiful slogan. Thank you for your presence and for your generous commitment to building a society of peace. Now, let us all listen to the message that your friends, next to me, will read to us.

And now the balloons will be released as a symbol of peace. I wish you all a good Sunday. I wish you peace, humility and sharing in your families. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and goodbye.
