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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 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 is the Pope's introduction to the Marian prayer:

Before the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we celebrate the solemnity of Mary Immaculate, which is situated in the context of Advent, a time of expectation: God will accomplish what He promised. But on today's feast day we are told that something has already been done, in the person and the life of the Virgin Mary. Today we consider the beginning of this fulfilment, which is even before the birth of the Mother of the Lord. In fact, her immaculate conception leads us to that precise moment in which Mary's life began to palpitate in her mother's womb: already there was the sanctifying love of God, preserving it from the contagion of evil that is the common inheritance of the human family.

In today's Gospel the Angel's greeting to Mary resounds: "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" (*Lk* 1,28). God has always thought of her and wanted her, in His inscrutable plan, to be a creature full of grace, that is, full of His love. But to be filled it is necessary to make room, to empty oneself, to step aside. Just as Mary did, she who knew how to listen to the Word of God and trust totally in His will, accepting it unreservedly in her own life. So much so that the Word became flesh in her. This was possible thanks to her "yes". To the Angel who asks her to be ready to become the mother of Jesus, Mary replies: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38).

Mary does not lose herself in reasoning, she does not place obstacles in the Lord's way, but she promptly

entrusts herself and leaves room for the action of the Holy Spirit. He immediately makes his whole being and his personal history available to God, so that the Word and the will of God may shape and bring them to fulfilment. Thus, perfectly corresponding to God's plan for her, Mary becomes the "all beautiful", the "all holy", but without the slightest shadow of complacency. She is humble. She is a masterpiece, but remaining humble, small, poor. In her is reflected the beauty of God Who is all love, grace, gift of self.

I also like to underline the word with which Mary defines herself in her surrender to God: she professes herself "the handmaid of the Lord". Mary's "yes" to God assumes from the beginning the attitude of service, of attention to the needs of others. This is testified concretely by the fact of the visit to Elizabeth, which immediately follows the Annunciation. availability to God is found in willingness to take on the needs of one's neighbour. All this without clamour and ostentation, without seeking places of honour, without advertising, because charity and works of mercy do not need to be exhibited as a trophy. The works of mercy are done in silence, in secret, without boasting of doing them. Even in our communities, we are called to follow the example of Mary, practicing the style of discretion and concealment.

May the feast of our Mother help us to make our whole life a "yes" to God, a "yes" made of adoration of Him and of daily gestures of love and service.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

Yesterday, in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, Giacomo Miller, a religious of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, was beatified. He was killed in hatred of the faith in 1982, in the context of the civil war. May the martyrdom of this exemplary educator of young people, who paid with his life for his service to the people and to the Guatemalan Church, strengthen in that dear Nation paths of justice, peace and solidarity. Let us applaud the new Blessed!

Tomorrow there will be a meeting in Paris between the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia and France and the Federal Chancellor of Germany – known as the "Normandy Format" – to seek solutions to the painful conflict that has been going on for years in eastern Ukraine. I accompany the meeting with prayer, an intense prayer, because peace is needed there, and I invite you to do the same, so that this initiative of political dialogue can contribute to bringing fruits of peace in justice to that territory and its people.

I greet you all with affection, pilgrims from Italy and various countries, in particular the Polish faithful of Warsaw and Lublin, Irish policemen and the young people of Sorbara, Modena. A special greeting goes to the Daughters of the Cross, recently recognized as a Public Association by the Cardinal Vicar.

On this feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Italian parishes renew their commitment to Catholic Action. I wish all members and groups a good journey of formation, service and witness.

I bless the faithful of Rocca di Papa and the torch with which they will light the large star on the fortress of the town, in honour of Mary Immaculate. And my thoughts also go to the Shrine of Loreto, where today the Holy Door for the Laetetan Jubilee will be opened: may it be rich in grace for the pilgrims to the Holy House.

This afternoon I will go to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major to pray to the Madonna, and then to Piazza di Spagna for the traditional act of homage at the foot of the monument to the Immaculate Conception. I ask you to join me spiritually in this gesture, which expresses filial devotion to our heavenly Mother.

I wish you all a happy feast and a happy Advent journey towards Christmas, with the guidance of the Virgin Mary. Please do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and goodbye!
