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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 for today's liturgy presents Jesus who heals a deaf man with a speech impediment. What is striking about this story is how the Lord performs this prodigious sign. He took the deaf man aside, put his finger into the man's ears, and touched his tongue with saliva. Then he looked up to heaven, groaned, and said to him: "*Ephphatha*", that is, "Be opened!" (cf Mk 7:33-34). In other healings, for infirmities as serious as paralysis or leprosy, Jesus did not do as many things. So why does he do all of this, even though they had only asked him to lay his hands on the sick man (cf. v.32)? Maybe it was because that person's condition had a particularly symbolic value. The condition of deafness is also a symbol that can say something to all of us. What is this about? *Deafness*. That man was unable to speak because he could not hear. To heal the cause of his infirmity, Jesus, in fact, placed his fingers first of all in the man's ears, then his mouth, but his ears first.

We all have ears, but very often we are not able to hear. Why is this? Brothers and sisters, there is an interior deafness that we can ask Jesus to touch and heal today. It is interior deafness, which is worse than physical deafness, because it is *the deafness of the heart*. Taken up with haste, by so many things to say and do, we do not find time to stop and listen to those who speak to us. We run the risk of becoming impervious to everything and not making room for those who need to be heard. I am thinking about children, young people, the elderly, the many who do not really need words and sermons, but to be heard. Let us ask ourselves: how is my capacity to listen going? Do I let myself be touched by people's lives? Do I know how to spend time with those who are close to me in order to listen? This regards all of us, but in a special way also priests. The priest must listen to

people, not in a rushed way, but listen and see how he can help, but after having listened. And all of us: first listen, then respond. Think about family life: how many times do we talk without listening first, repeating the same things, always the same things! Incapable of listening, we always say the same things, or we do not let the other person finish talking, expressing themselves, and we interrupt them. Starting a dialogue often happens not through words but silence, by not insisting, by patiently beginning anew to listen to others, hearing about their struggles and what they carry inside. The healing of the heart begins with listening. Listening. This is what restores the heart. "But Father, there are boring people who say the same things over and over again..." Listen to them. And then, when they have finished talking, you may speak, but listen to everything.

And the same is true with the Lord. It is good to inundate Him with requests, but it is better that we first of all listen to him. Jesus requests this. In the Gospel, when they ask him what is the first commandment, he answered: "*Hear, O Israel*". Then he added the first commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...(and) your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:28-31). But first of all, "*Hear, O Israel*". Do we remember to listen to the Lord? We are Christians, but sometimes with the thousands of words we hear every day, we do not find a moment to let a few words of the Gospel resound in us. Jesus is the Word: if we do not stop to listen to Him, He moves on. Saint Augustine said, "I fear that Jesus will pass by me unnoticed." And the fear was to let Him pass by without hearing Him. But if we dedicate time to the Gospel, we will find the secret for our spiritual health. This is the medicine: every day a little silence and listening, fewer useless words and more of the Word of God. Always with the Gospel in your pocket that can help greatly. Today, as on the day of our Baptism, we hear the words of Jesus addressed to us: "*Ephphatha*, be opened!" Open your ears. Jesus, I want to open myself to your Word; Jesus, open myself to listening to you; Jesus, heal my heart from being closed, heal my heart from haste, heal my heart from impatience.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was open to hearing the Word which became flesh in her, help us every day to listen to her Son in the Gospel and to our brothers and sisters with a docile heart, with a patient heart, and with an attentive heart.

After the Angelus

Yesterday, in Catamarca, Argentina, Mamerto Esquiú, Friar Minor and Bishop of Cordoba, was beatified. Finally, an Argentinean Blessed! He was a zealous proclaimer of the Word of God in building up the Church and civil society. May his example help us to always unite prayer and the apostolate, and to serve peace and fraternity. Let us applaud together the new Blessed!

In these troubled times that see Afghans seeking refuge, I pray for the most vulnerable among them. I pray that many countries will welcome and protect those seeking a new life. I pray also for the internally displaced persons and that they may receive assistance and the necessary protection. May young Afghans receive education, an essential good for human development. And may all Afghans, whether at home, in transit, or in host countries, live with dignity, in peace and fraternity with their neighbours.

I assure my prayers for the people of the United States of America who have been hit by a strong hurricane in recent days. May the Lord receive the souls of the deceased and sustain those suffering from this calamity.

In the coming days the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah*, will be celebrated. And then the two feasts of *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*. I extend my heartfelt good wishes to all my brothers and sisters of the Jewish religion: may the New Year be rich in fruits of peace and good for those who walk faithfully in the Lord's Law.

Next Sunday I will travel to Budapest for the conclusion of the International Eucharistic Congress. My pilgrimage will continue after the Mass for a few days in Slovakia, and will conclude the following Wednesday with the great popular celebration of Our Lady of Sorrows, Patroness of that country. These will be days marked by *adoration* and *prayer* in the heart of Europe. While I greet affectionately those who have prepared this journey - and I thank you - and those who await me and whom I myself wholeheartedly wish to meet, I ask everyone to accompany

me in prayer, and I entrust the visits I will undertake to the intercession of so many heroic confessors of the faith, who in those places bore witness to the Gospel amid hostility and persecution. May they help Europe to bear witness today also, not so much in words but above all in deeds, with works of mercy and hospitality, the good news of the Lord who loves us and saves us. Thank you!

And now my greetings to you, dear Romans and pilgrims! In particular, I offer my best wishes to the Legion of Mary, which is celebrating its hundredth anniversary: May God bless you and may the Virgin protect you! I greet the young people of “Opera della Chiesa”, the children of Faenza and those of Castenedolo who have received Confirmation and First Communion, the group from Arta Terme and the Polish and Lithuanian faithful accompanied by their friends from Abruzzo.

Today is the memorial of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, known to all as Mother Teresa. A big round of applause! I address my greetings to all the Missionaries of Charity, working around the world and offering often heroic service. I am thinking in particular of the Sisters of the “Dono di Maria” (Gift of Mary homeless shelter), here in the Vatican.

I wish everyone a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
