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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

At midday today, fourth Sunday of Advent, 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!*

Today, the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the liturgy presents the figure of Saint Joseph to us (cf. *Mt* 1:18-24). He is a just man who is about to get married. We can imagine what his dreams for the future are – a beautiful family, with an affectionate wife and many wonderful children, and a dignified job – simple and good dreams, the dreams of simple and good people. But all of a sudden, these dreams come up against a disconcerting discovery. Mary, his betrothed, is expecting a child, and the child is not his! What would Joseph have felt? Shock, pain, confusion, perhaps even irritation and disappointment.... But... He experienced his world was falling apart all around him! And what was he supposed to do?

The Law gives him two options. The first is to *accuse* Mary and make her pay the price for her alleged infidelity. The second is to secretly annul their engagement without exposing Mary to scandal and to harsh consequences, taking upon himself, however, the burden of shame. So, Joseph chooses this second option, which is *the way of mercy*. And behold, at the height of his crisis, right when he is thinking and evaluating all this, God gives him a new light in his heart – he declares to him in a dream that Mary's motherhood did not come about because of a betrayal, but was the work of the Holy Spirit, and the baby to be born would be the Saviour (cf. *vv.* 20-21), and Mary would be the Mother of the Messiah, and he would be His guardian. On waking up, Joseph understands that the greatest dream of every devout Israelite – to be the father of the Messiah – was being fulfilled for him in a completely *unexpected way*.

To accomplish this, in fact, it was not enough to belong to David's lineage and to be a faithful observer of the law, but he would need to entrust himself above and beyond all else to God, welcome Mary and her Son in a completely different way than was expected, differently than had ever been done. In other words, Joseph would have to renounce all reassuring certainties, his perfect plans, his legitimate expectations, and open himself to a future that was completely to be discovered. And before God, who disrupts his plans and asks that he trust Him, Joseph says "yes". Joseph's courage is heroic and is exercised in silence – his courage is to trust, he welcomes, he is willing, he asks for no further guarantees.

Brothers and sisters, what does Joseph say to us today? We too have our dreams, and perhaps we think of them more, we talk about them together at Christmas. Perhaps we lament over some dreams that have been shattered and we see that our best expectations often need to be put together with unexpected, disconcerting situations. And when this happens, Joseph shows us the way. We do not need to give in to negative feelings, like anger or isolation – this is the wrong way! Instead, we need to attentively welcome surprises, the surprises in life, even crises. When we find ourselves in crisis, we should not make decisions quickly or instinctively, but let them pass through the sieve, like Joseph did who "considered everything" (cf. v. 20), and base ourselves on the underlying certainty of God's mercy. When someone experiences a crisis without giving in to isolation, anger, and fear, but keeps the door open for God, He can intervene. He is an expert in transforming crises into dreams – yes, *God opens crises into new horizons* we never would have imagined before, perhaps not as we would expect, but in the way He knows how. And these, brothers and sisters, are God's horizons – surprising – but infinitely more grand and beautiful than ours! May the Virgin Mary help us live open to God's surprises.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am concerned about the situation created in the Lachin Corridor in the Southern Caucasus. I am particularly concerned about the precarious humanitarian conditions of the population which risk further deterioration during the course of the winter season. I ask everyone involved to commit themselves to finding peaceful solutions for the good of the people.

And in addition, let us also pray for peace in Peru, that the violence in that country might cease and that the path of dialogue might be embarked upon to overcome the political and social crisis that is afflicting the population.

I greet all of you affectionately, those of you who have come from Rome, from Italy and from many parts of the world. I especially greet members of the faithful from California, and those from Madrid, as well as the groups from Praia A Mare, Catania, Caraglio, and from the parish of Santi Protomartiri in Rome.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, whom the liturgy invites us to contemplate on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, to touch the hearts of those who can stop the war in Ukraine. Let us not forget the suffering of those people, especially of the babies, the elderly, the people who are sick. Let us pray. Let us pray.

I wish all of you a good Sunday and that your journey during this last stage of Advent might go well. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch and *arrivederci*.
