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Angelus: Jesus' mercy is disarming

Vatican City, 13 March 2016 – In his meditation before today's Sunday Angelus, the Holy Father commented on the passage from Gospel of St. John that narrates the episode of the adulteress. "It is beautiful, and I like reading and rereading it", said Francis, who described the scene that takes place outside the Temple of Jerusalem and told those present in the Square to imagine it as if it were outside St. Peter's Basilica.

"Jesus is teaching the people, when some scribes and Pharisees arrive and drag before Him a woman caught committing adultery. The woman thus finds herself between Jesus and the crowd, between the mercy of the Son of God and the violence and anger of her accusers. In reality, they did not come to the Master to ask for His opinion – they were bad people – but rather to set a trap. Indeed, if Jesus followed the severity of the law, approving the stoning of the woman, He would lose His reputation for gentleness and goodness that so fascinated the people; if, on the contrary, He was merciful, He would have gone against the law, that He Himself had said He did not wish to abolish but rather to fulfil".

The Pope continued, "Their bad intention is concealed in the question they put to Jesus, 'So what do you say?'. Jesus does not answer; He is silent and makes a mysterious gesture: 'Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger'. Maybe He was making a drawing, some say He was writing the sins of the Pharisees. In any case, He wrote, as if He were elsewhere. In this way, He invites everyone to be calm, not to act out of impulsiveness, and to seek God's justice. But those, who were bad, insist and expect an answer from Him. It seemed they had a thirst for blood. Then, Jesus looks up and says, 'Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her'. This response catches the accusers off guard, disarming them all, in the true sense of the word: they all set down their 'weapons', that is, the stones they were ready to throw, both the visible ones for the woman, and the hidden ones intended to be used against Jesus. And as the Lord continues to draw on the earth ... the accusers leave one after the other, with heads down, beginning with the oldest, more aware of not being without sin. How good it is for us to be aware that we are sinners! When we speak ill of others – all things that we know well – it befits us to have the courage to drop on the ground the stones we have ready to throw at others, and reflect on our sins".

"Only the woman and Jesus remained there", emphasised Francis. "Misery and mercy, facing each other. How often does this happen to us when we stop in front of the confessional, with shame, to express our misery and ask forgiveness? 'Woman, where are they?', Jesus says to her. This expression, and His eyes full of mercy, full

of love, are enough to make the person feel – perhaps for the first time – that she has dignity, that she is not her sin, but has the dignity of a person; that she can change her life, can exit from her bondage and walk a new path".

"She represents all of us, we who are sinners, adulterers before God, traitors of His loyalty", he exclaimed. "And her experience represents God's will for each of us: not our condemnation, but our salvation through Jesus. He is the grace that saves us from sin and death. He wrote in the ground, in the dust of which every human being is made, God's judgement: 'I do not want you to die, but that you live'. God does not nail us to our sin, He does not identify us with the wrongs we have committed. We have a name, and God does not identify this name with the sin we have committed. He wants to free us, and wants that we too wish to be with Him. He wants our freedom to transform from evil to good, and this is possible with His grace".

After the Angelus prayer, on the third anniversary of his election as Pontiff, the Pope gave a pocket Gospel to the thousands of faithful present in St. Peter's Square. The Gospel of St. Luke, which reproduces the words of Jesus, "Be merciful, just as your Father is", that inspired the Extraordinary Jubilee, was distributed by volunteers from the Santa Marta Paediatric Dispensary and a number of elderly people and grandparents from Rome.

"How worthy are the grandparents who transmit faith to their grandchildren!", observed the Holy Father. "I invite you to read a passage from this Gospel every day; the Father's mercy will thus dwell in your heart and you will be able to bring it to all those you meet. And at the end, on page 123, there are the seven corporal works of mercy and the seven spiritual works of mercy. It would be good to learn these by heart, as in this way it is easier to perform them. I invite you to take this Gospel so that the mercy of the Lord may work in you".
