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The Pope invites perseverance in prayer for Christian unity, and prays for earthquake and avalanche victims in Italy

After praying the Angelus, the Pope reminded the thousands of people gathered in St. Peter's Square that we are celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which bases its theme this year – 'Reconciliation: the love of Christ compels us' – on a phrase of St. Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14). Next Wednesday we will conclude the Week of Prayer with the celebration of Vespers in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, which will be attended by brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian communities present in Rome. I invite you to persevere in prayer, so that Jesus' desire is fulfilled: 'That they may all be one'", said the Holy Father.

"In recent days, an earthquake and heavy snowfalls have again harshly afflicted our brothers and sisters in Central Italy, especially in Abruzzo, the Marches and Lazio. I am close in prayer and affection to the families with victims among their loved ones. I encourage all those who are engaged with great generosity in the works of rescue and aid, as well as the local Churches, which are making great efforts to alleviate suffering and difficulties. Thank you so much for your closeness, for your work and the practical help you bring. Thank you! I invite you to pray together to Our Lady for the victims and also for those who with great generosity participate in the rescue operations".

After praying the Hail Mary, Pope Francis recalled that in the Far East and in several parts of the world, millions of men and women are preparing to celebrate the lunar New Year on January 28, and he conveyed his warm greeting to all families, expressing his wish that they increasingly become "a school in which one learns to respect the other, to communicate and look after one another in a selfless way. May the joy of love be propagated within families, and radiate from them to the whole of society".

Finally, he greeted the faithful of Rome and pilgrims from various countries present in the Square, especially the group of young people from the students of the "Diego Sánchez" Institute of Talavera la Real in Spain. He also greeted the members of the Catholic Union of Teachers, Directors, Educators and Formators at the end of their 25th National Congress, and wished them "fruitful educational work, in collaboration with families – always in collaboration with families!"

"I wish you all a good Sunday and, please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and see you soon!"

