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The Pope's words at the Angelus prayer

Before the Angelus

After the Angelus

At midday today – Feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr – 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!

After celebrating the birth of Jesus on earth, today we celebrate the birth of Saint Stephen, the first martyr, in heaven. Even if at first glance, it might seem that there is no link between the two events, there is, and it is very strong.

Yesterday, in the liturgy of Christmas, we heard it proclaimed that: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn 1:14*). Saint Stephen challenged the leaders of his people, because, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (*Acts 6: 5*), he firmly believed and professed the new presence of God among men; he knew that the true temple of God is now Jesus, the Eternal Word Who came to dwell among us, Who was made like us, except in sin. But Stephen is accused of preaching the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The accusation against him is that "we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us" (*Acts 6:14*).

Indeed, Jesus' message is uncomfortable and makes us uncomfortable, because it challenges worldly religious power and provokes consciences. After His coming, it is necessary to convert, to change mentality, to give up thinking as before. Stephen remained anchored to Jesus' message until His death. His last prayers: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59-60) are the faithful echo of those pronounced by Jesus on the Cross: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit" (*Lk 23:46*) and "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (v. 34). Those words of Stephen were possible only because the Son of God came to earth and died and rose for us; before these events, they were humanly unthinkable expressions.

Stephen begs Jesus to welcome His spirit. Indeed, the Risen Christ is the Lord, and He is the only mediator between God and men, not only in the hour of our death, but also in every moment of life: without Him, we can do nothing (cf. *Jn 15: 5*). Therefore, we too, before the Child Jesus in the crib, can pray to Him in this way: "Lord Jesus, we entrust our spirit to you, welcome it", so that our existence may indeed be a good life in accordance with the Gospel.

Jesus is our mediator and reconciles us not only with the Father, but also among ourselves. He is the source of love, which opens us to communion with our brothers, removing all conflict and resentment. Let us ask Jesus, born for us, to help us to take on this dual attitude of trust in the Father and love of neighbour; it is an attitude that transforms life and makes it more beautiful and fruitful.

To Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Queen of the martyrs, we lift up our prayer with confidence, that she may help us accept Jesus as Lord of our life and become His courageous witnesses ready to pay, through our person, the price of fidelity to the Gospel.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the atmosphere of Christian joy that springs from the Nativity of Jesus, I greet you and thank you for your presence.

To all of you, who have come from Italy and from different countries, I renew my wish for peace and serenity: may these be, for you and your family, days in which you can enjoy the beauty of being together, knowing and feeling Jesus is in our midst.

A special greeting to the faithful of the Ukrainian national pilgrimage: I bless all of you and your country.

Over these weeks, I have received many Christmas greetings. Since I have not been able to respond to each one, I express my heartfelt thanks to you all today, especially for the gift of prayer. Thank you from the heart! May the Lord reward you with His generosity!

Happy feast day! Please, do not forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch and goodbye.
