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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!*

Today, in the Liturgy, the Gospel narrates the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, chief of the publicans of the city of Jericho (*Lk 19: 1-10*). At the centre of this account there is the verb *to seek*. Pay attention: *to seek*. Zacchaeus "was seeking to see who Jesus was" (v. 3), and Jesus, after meeting him, states: "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost" (v. 10). Let us focus a little on these two gazes that seek: *the gaze of Zacchaeus* who is seeking Jesus, and *the gaze of Jesus* who is looking for Zacchaeus.

The gaze of Zacchaeus. He is a publican, that is, one of those Jews who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman rulers, a traitor of the homeland, and took advantage of their position. Therefore, Zacchaeus was rich, hated – hated! – by all and branded a sinner. The text says "he was short in stature" (v. 3), and this perhaps also alludes to his inner baseness, to his mediocre, dishonest life, with his gaze always turned downwards. But the important thing is that he was little. And yet, Zacchaeus *wants to see Jesus*. Something drove him to see him. "He ran ahead", says the Gospel, "and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way" (v. 4). He climbed a sycamore: Zacchaeus, the man who dominated everyone, made himself ridiculous and took the path of ridicule – to see Jesus. Let us think a little of what would happen if, for instance, a minister of the economy climbed a tree to look at something: he would risk mockery. And Zacchaeus risked mockery to see Jesus, he made himself look ridiculous. Zacchaeus, despite his lowliness, feels the need to seek another way of looking, that of Christ. He does not yet know him, but he awaits someone who will free him from his condition – morally low – to bring him out of the mire in which he finds himself. This is fundamental: Zacchaeus teaches us that, in life, all is never lost. Please, all is never lost, never. We can always find space for the desire to begin again, to start over, to convert. Re-convert, re-begin, re-start. And this is what Zacchaeus does.

In this regard, the second aspect is decisive: *the gaze of Jesus*. He was sent by the Father to seek those who are lost; and when he arrives in Jericho, he passes right by the tree where Zacchaeus is. The Gospel narrates that “Jesus looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house” (v. 5). It is a truly beautiful image, because if Jesus has to look up, it means that he is looking at Zacchaeus from below. This is the history of salvation: God has never looked down on us – no; to humiliate us – no; – to judge us – no; on the contrary, he lowered himself to the point of washing our feet, looking at us from below and restoring our dignity to us. In this way, the meeting of eyes between Zacchaeus and Jesus seems to encapsulate the whole of salvation history: humanity, with its miseries, seeks redemption, but firstly, God, with mercy, seeks the creature to save it.

Brothers, sisters, let us remember this: the gaze of God never stops at our past, full of errors, but looks with infinite confidence at what we can become. And if at times we feel we are people who are “short in stature”, not up to the challenges of life and far less of the Gospel, mired in problems and sins, Jesus always looks at us with love, he looks at us: as with Zacchaeus, he comes towards us, he calls us by name and, if we welcome him, he comes to our home. Then we might ask ourselves: how do we look at ourselves? Do we feel inadequate, and resign ourselves, or precisely there, when we feel down, do we seek the encounter with Jesus? And then: what gaze do we have towards those who have erred, and who struggle to get up again from the dust of their mistakes? Is it a gaze from above, that judges, disdains, excludes? Remember that it is legitimate to look down on someone only to help them get up again: nothing more. Only then is it legitimate to look down from above. But we Christians must have the gaze of Christ, who embraces from below, who seeks those who are lost, with compassion. This is, and must be, the gaze of the Church, always, the gaze of Christ, not the condemning gaze.

Let us pray to Mary, whose humility the Lord looked upon, and ask her for the gift of a new outlook on ourselves and on others.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

While we celebrate Christ’s victory over evil and over death, let us pray for the victims of the terrorist attack in Mogadishu, which killed more than a hundred people, including many children. May God convert the hearts of the violent!

And let us pray to the Risen Lord also for those – especially the young – who died in Seoul last night, as a tragic consequence of a sudden crowd surge.

Yesterday, in Medellín, Colombia, Blessed María Berenice Duque Hencker, founder of the Little Sisters of the Annunciation, was beatified. She spent all of her long life, which ended in 1993, in the service of God and her brothers and sisters, especially the small and the excluded. May her apostolic zeal, which drove her to take the message of Jesus beyond the borders of her country, strengthen in everyone the desire to participate, with prayer and charity, in the dissemination of the Gospel throughout the world. An applause for the new Blessed, everyone!

I greet you, Romans and pilgrims from various countries: families, parish groups, associations, individual faithful. In particular I greet, from Spain, the faithful from Córdoba, and the Orfeón Donostiarra” choir from San Sebastián, which is celebrating 125 years of activity; the girls and boys of the Hakuna Movement; the group of São Paulo, Brazil; and the Indonesian clerics and men and women religious resident in Rome. I greet the participants in the conference organized by the worldwide “Uniservitate” network and by LUMSA; as well as the children from Naples preparing for their first Communion and the groups of faithful from Magreta, Nocera Inferiore and Nardò. And the young people of the *Immacolata*.

Please, let us not forget martyred Ukraine in our prayer and in our heartache. Let us pray for peace, never tire of doing so!

I wish you all a blessed Sunday. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch, and *arrivederci!*
