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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!*

The Gospel of today's liturgy (*Jn* 6:60-69) shows us the reaction of the crowd and the disciples to Jesus' discourse following the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus invited them to interpret that sign and believe in Him, who is the true bread come down from heaven, the bread of life; and He revealed that the bread He will give is His body and blood. These words sound harsh and incomprehensible to the ears of the people, so much so that, from that moment, the Gospel says, many of His disciples turn back; that is, they stop following the Master (vv. 60, 66). Then Jesus asks the Twelve: "Do you also wish to go away?" (v. 67), and Peter, on behalf of the whole group, confirms their decision to stay with Him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (*Jn* 6:68-69). And it is a beautiful confession of faith.

Let us look briefly at the attitude of those who withdrew and did not follow Jesus any more. Where does this disbelief come from? What is the reason for this rejection?

Jesus' words enkindled great scandal: He was saying that God decided to manifest Himself and accomplish salvation in the weakness of human flesh. It is the mystery of incarnation. The incarnation of God is what provoked scandal and presented an obstacle for those people - but often for us too. Indeed, Jesus affirms that the true bread of salvation, which transmits eternal life, is His very flesh; that to enter into communion with God, before observing the laws or satisfying religious precepts, it is necessary to live out a real and concrete

relationship with Him. Because salvation came from Him, in His incarnation. This means that one must not pursue God in dreams and in images of grandeur and power, but He must be recognised in the humanity of Jesus and, as a consequence, in that of the brothers and sisters we meet on the path of life. God made Himself flesh. And when we say this, in the Creed, on Christmas Day, on the day of the Annunciation, we kneel to worship this mystery of incarnation. God made Himself flesh and blood; He lowered himself to the point of becoming a man like us. He humbled Himself to the extent of burdening Himself with our sufferings and sin, and therefore He asks us to not seek Him outside life and history, but in relationship with Christ and with our brothers and sisters. Seeking Him in life, in history, in our daily life. And this, brothers and sisters, is the road to the encounter with God: the relationship with Christ and our brothers and sisters.

Even today, God's revelation in Jesus' humanity can cause scandal and is not easy to accept. This is what Saint Paul calls the "folly" of the Gospel in the face of those who seek miracles or worldly wisdom (cf. *1 Cor* 1:18-25). And this "scandalousness" is well represented by the sacrament of the Eucharist: what sense can there be, in the eyes of the world, in kneeling before a piece of bread? Why on earth should someone be nourished assiduously with this bread? The world is scandalised.

Faced with this prodigious deed of Jesus, who with five loaves and two fish fed thousands of people, everyone acclaimed Him and wanted to lift Him up in triumph, to make Him king. But when He Himself explained that the gesture was a sign of His sacrifice, that is, of the gift of His life, His flesh and blood, and that those who want to follow Him must resemble Him, His humanity given for God and for others, then no, this Jesus no longer was no longer liked, this Jesus throws us into crisis. Rather, we should be worried if He does not throw us into crisis, because we might have watered down His message! And let us ask for the grace to let ourselves be provoked and converted by His "words of eternal life". And may Mary Most Holy, who bore her Son Jesus in the flesh and joined herself to His sacrifice, help us to always bear witness to our faith in our real lives.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all, faithful of Rome and pilgrims from various countries. There are many countries represented here, I see from the flags...

In particular, I greet the priests and seminarians of the Pontifical North American College - they are over there - as well as families from Abbiategrasso and motorcyclists from Polesine.

Again this Sunday I am pleased to greet several groups of young people: from Cornuda, Covolo di Piave and Nogaré, in the diocese of Treviso, Rogoredo in Milan, Dalmine, Cagliari, Pescantina near Verona, and the scout group from Mantova. Dear boys and girls, many of you have had the experience of a long journey together: may this help you to walk through life on the path of the Gospel. And I also greet the young people of the *Immacolata*.

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