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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, happy Sunday!

The Gospel of today's liturgy (cf. *Jn* 1:29-34) relates the testimony of John the Baptist on Jesus, after having baptized him in the river Jordan. He says: "After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me" (vv. 29-30).

This declaration, this witness, reveals John's *spirit of service*. He was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, and had done so without sparing himself. Humanly speaking, one would think that he would be given a "prize", a prominent place in Jesus' public life. But no. John, having accomplished his mission, knows how to step aside, he withdraws from the scene to make way for Jesus. He has seen the Spirit descend upon him (cf. vv. 33-34), he has indicated him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and now he in turn humbly listens. He goes from prophet to disciple. He preached to the people, gathered disciples and trained them for a long time. Yet he does not bind anyone to himself. And this is difficult, but it is the sign of the true educator: not binding people to himself. John does this: he sets his disciples in Jesus' footsteps. He is not interested in having a following for himself, in gaining prestige and success, but he bears witness and then takes a step back, so that many would have the joy of meeting Jesus. We can say: he opens the door, then he leaves.

With this spirit of service, with his capacity to give way to Jesus, John the Baptist teaches us an important thing: *freedom from attachments*. Yes, because it is easy to become attached to roles and positions, to the need to be esteemed, recognized and rewarded. And this, although natural, is not a good thing, because service involves

gratuitousness, taking care of others without benefit for oneself, without ulterior motives, without expecting something in return. It is good for us, too, to cultivate, like John, the virtue of setting ourselves aside at the right moment, bearing witness that the point of reference of life is Jesus. To step aside, to learn to take one's leave: I have completed this mission, I have had this meeting, I will step aside and leave room to the Lord. To learn to step aside, not to take something for ourselves in recompense.

Let us think of how important this is for a priest, who is required to preach and celebrate, not out of self-importance or interest, but to accompany others to Jesus. Think of how important this is for parents, to raise their children with many sacrifices, but then they have to leave them free to take their own path in work, in marriage, in life. It is good and right that parents continue to assure their presence, saying to their children, "We will not leave you by yourselves", but with discretion, without intrusiveness. The freedom to grow. And the same applies to other spheres, such as friendships, life as a couple, community life. Freeing oneself from attachments to one's own ego and knowing how to step aside come at a cost, but are very important: this is the decisive step in order to grow in the spirit of service, without looking for something in return.

Brothers, sisters, let us try to ask ourselves: are we capable of making space for others? Of listening to them, of leaving them free, of not binding them to ourselves, demanding recognition? And also, of letting them speak, at times. Do not say, "But you know nothing!". Let them speak, make space for others. Do we attract others to Jesus, or to ourselves? And furthermore, following the example of John: do we know how to rejoice in the fact that people take their own path and follow their calling, even if this entails some detachment from us? Do we rejoice in their achievements, with sincerity and without envy? This is letting others grow.

May Mary, the servant of the Lord, help us to be free from attachments, to make way for the Lord and to give space to others.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

From 18 to 25 January the traditional *Week of prayer for Christian Unity* will be held. The theme this year is taken from the prophet Isaiah: "Learn to do good; seek justice" (1:17). Let us thank the Lord who guides his people towards full communion with faithfulness and patience, and let us ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and sustain us with his gifts.

The path towards Christian unity and the path of the synodal conversion of the Church are linked. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to announce that on Saturday 30 January, in Saint Peter's Square, an *Ecumenical Prayer Vigil* will take place, with which we will entrust to God the work of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. For the young people who come to the Vigil there will be a special programme throughout the weekend, organized by the Taizé Community. As of now, I invite all brothers and sisters of all the Christian denominations to participate in this gathering of the People of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us not forget the tormented Ukrainian people, who are suffering greatly. Let us stay close to them with our sentiments, our aid, and our prayer.

And I now greet you, Romans and pilgrims gathered here. In particular, I greet the Spanish faithful of Murcia and those of Sciacca in Sicilia. May your visit to the tomb of Peter strengthen your faith and your witness.

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