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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!*

On this second Sunday of Advent, the Gospel speaks to us about John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus (cf. *Mk* 1:1-8), and it describes him as "the voice of one crying in the desert" (v. 3). The desert, an empty place, where you do not communicate; and the voice, a means to speak – these seem like two contradictory images. But they are joined in the Baptist.

The *desert*. John preaches there, near the Jordan River, near the place where his people had entered the promised land many centuries earlier (cf. *Joshua* 3:1-17). In so doing, it is like he was saying: to listen to God, we must return to the place where, for forty years, he accompanied, protected and educated his people, in the desert. This is the place of silence and essentials, where someone cannot afford to dwell on useless things, but needs to concentrate on what is indispensable in order to live.

And this is an always relevant reminder: to proceed on the journey of life, we need to be stripped of the "more", because to live well does not mean being filled with useless things, but being freed from the superfluous, to dig deeply within ourselves so as to hold on to what is truly important before God. Only if, through silence and prayer, we make space for Jesus, who is the Word of the Father, will we know how to be freed from the pollution of vain words and chatter. Silence and sobriety – from words, from the use of things, from the media and social media – these are not just *fioretti* (translator's note: a common practice in Italian devotional life in which someone offers a small sacrifice, a resolution, or the proposal to do a good deed to Our Lord or Our Lady) or

virtues, they are essential elements in the Christian life.

And we come to the second image, the *voice*. This is the means by which we manifest what we think and what we bear in our hearts. We understand, therefore, that it is quite connected with silence, because it expresses what matures inside, from listening to what the Spirit suggests. Brothers and sisters, if someone does not know how to be quiet, it is unlikely they will have something good to say; while, the more attentive the silence, the stronger the word. In John the Baptist that voice is linked to the genuineness of his experience and the purity of his heart.

We can ask ourselves: What place does silence have in my days? Is it an empty, perhaps oppressive, silence? Or is it a space for listening, for prayer, for guarding my heart? Is my life sober or filled with superfluous things? Even if it means going against the tide, let us value silence, sobriety and listening. May Mary, Virgin of silence, help us to love the desert, to become credible voices who testify to her Son who is coming.

After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters!

Seventy-five years ago, on 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed. It is like a master plan. Many steps have been taken, many still need to be made, and unfortunately, at times, steps backward have been taken. The commitment to human rights is never finished! In this regard, I am near all those who, without fanfare, in concrete daily life, fight and personally pay the price defending the rights of those who do not count.

I welcome the release of a significant number of Armenian and Azerbaijani prisoners. I look with great hope on this positive sign between Armenia and Azerbaijan, for peace in the Southern Caucasus, and I encourage the parties and their leaders to conclude the peace treaty as soon as possible.

In a few days, the work of COP28 on the climate, underway in Dubai, will conclude. I ask all of you to pray for a good outcome for the care of our common home and the protection of people.

And we continue to pray for the populations who are suffering because of war. We are heading toward Christmas: Are we able, with God's help, to take concrete steps of peace? It is not easy; we know that. Certain conflicts have historically deep roots. But we also have the testimony of men and women who have worked wisely and patiently for peaceful coexistence. Let their example be followed! Let every effort be put toward addressing and removing the causes of conflict, while at the same time – speaking of human rights – protecting civilians, hospitals, places of worship, freeing hostages and guaranteeing human rights. Let us not forget battered Ukraine, Palestine, Israel.

I assure my prayers to the victims of the fire that took place two days ago in the hospital in Tivoli.

I heartfully greet all of you, pilgrims from Rome, and Italy, and other parts of the world, particularly the faithful from San Nicola Manfredi, the adult scouts from Scafati and the groups of young people from Nevoli, Gerenzano and Rovigo.

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