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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 recounts the episode of the wedding at Cana, where, to the couple's delight, Jesus transformed water into wine. This is the way the account ends: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (*Jn 2:11*). We notice that the evangelist John does not speak of a miracle, that is, of a powerful and extraordinary deed that provokes wonder. He writes that a *sign* took place at Cana, a sign that sparked the faith of his disciples. We can, then, ask ourselves: What is a "sign" according to the Gospel?

It is a sign that gives a clue that reveals God's love, that does not call attention to the power of the action, but to the love that caused it. It teaches us something about God's love that is always near, tender and compassionate. Jesus' first sign took place when a couple faced a difficulty on the most important day of their lives. Right in the middle of the feast, an essential element for a feast, the wine, is missing and their joy risked being snuffed out due to the criticism and dissatisfaction of the guests. Imagine how a wedding feast could go ahead only with water. How terrible! What a bad impression the couple would make.

It is Our Lady who became aware of the problem and discretely brought it to Jesus' attention. And he intervened without fanfare, almost without making it obvious. Everything took place reservedly, everything took place "behind the scenes" – Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water, then it became wine. This is how God acts, near to us and discretely. Jesus' disciples understood this: they saw that, thanks to him, the wedding

banquet became even more beautiful. And they saw the way Jesus acted as well – the way he served hiddenly (this is Jesus – he helps us, he serves us hiddenly) in that moment so much so that it was the groom who was complimented for the good wine. Nobody was aware of it, only the servants. This is how the seed of faith began to develop within them – that is, they believed that God, God’s love, was present in Jesus.

How beautiful it is to think that the first sign Jesus accomplished was not an extraordinary healing or something prodigious in the temple of Jerusalem, but an action that responded to a simple and concrete need of common people, a domestic gesture. Let us put it this way – a miracle done on tip toes, discretely, silently. Jesus is ready to help us, to lift us up. And then, if we are attentive to these “signs”, we will be conquered by his love and we will become his disciples.

But there is another distinctive characteristic about the sign at Cana. Generally, the wine provided at the end of the feast was not as good – this is still done today. At that point, people don’t distinguish as well if it is good wine or wine that’s been diluted a little. Jesus, instead, acts in such a way that the feast ends with *better wine*. Symbolically, this tells us that God wants what is better for us, he wants us to be happy. He does not set limits and he does not ask us for incentives. There is no place for ulterior motives or demands placed on the couple. No, the joy Jesus brought to their hearts was complete and disinterested joy, a joy that was not diluted, no!

So, I want to suggest an exercise to you that would be very good for us. Today, let us try to rummage through our memories, looking for the *signs* the Lord has accomplished in my life. Let each of us say: in my life, what are the signs the Lord has accomplished? What are the hints of his presence, the signs he has done to show that he loves us? Let us think about that difficult moment in which God allowed me to experience his love... And let us ask ourselves: what are the discrete and loving signs through which he has allowed me to feel his tenderness? When have I felt the Lord nearer to me? When have I felt his tenderness and his compassion more? Every one of us has these moments in our personal history. Let us go in search of these signs, let us remember them. How have I discovered his nearness and how did it fill my heart with great joy? Let us relive the moments in which we have experienced his presence and Mary’s intercession. May she, the Mother who is always attentive as at Cana, help us treasure the signs of God’s presence in our lives.

### After the Angelus

Dear brothers and sisters,

I express my nearness to the people hit by strong rain and flooding in various regions of Brazil during these past weeks. I am especially praying for the victims and their families, and for those who have lost their homes. May God sustain the efforts of those who are providing relief.

From 18 to 25 January, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will take place. This year’s proposal mirrors the experience of the Magi who came from the East to Bethlehem to honour the Messianic King. We Christians, in the diversity of our confessions and traditions, are also pilgrims on the way toward full unity, and we will draw near our goal to the extent that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, our only Lord. During the Week of Prayer, let us offer our difficulties and sufferings for the unity of Christians.

I greet all of you from Rome and pilgrims from various countries. I extend a special greeting to the *Girasoli della Locride* group from Locri, along with their families and leaders.

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

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