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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 presents us the *three parables of mercy* (cf. Lk 15, 4-32); this is what they are called because they show God's merciful heart. Jesus tells them to respond to the grumblings of the pharisees and the scribes, who say: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them" (v.2). They are scandalized because Jesus was among sinners. If for them this is religiously scandalous, Jesus, by welcoming sinners and eating with them, reveals to us that God is just like that: God excludes no one, he wants everyone at his banquet, because he loves everyone as his children: everyone, no-one excluded, everyone. The three parables, then, summarize the heart of the Gospel: God is the Father and comes in search of us whenever we are lost.

Indeed, the protagonists of the parables, who represent God, are a shepherd who searches for the lost sheep, a woman who finds the lost coin, and the father of the prodigal son. Let us dwell on an aspect that all these three protagonists have in common. All three of them essentially have something in common, which we might define thus: restlessness for something that is missing – whether you are missing a sheep, you are missing a coin, you are missing a son – the unease of missing something, all three protagonists of these parables are uneasy because they are missing something. All three, after all, if they were to calculate, could rest easy: the shepherd is missing a sheep, but he has ninety-nine others – "Let it be lost..."; the woman is missing a coin, but has nine others; and even the father has another son, obedient, to devote himself to – why think about the one who has gone off to live a dissolute life? Nonetheless, there is anxiety in their hearts – of the shepherd, the woman and the father – about what is missing: the sheep, the coin, the son who has gone away. One who loves is

concerned about the one who is missing, longs for who is absent, seeks who is lost, awaits who has gone astray. For he wants no-one to be lost.

Brothers and sisters, God is like this: he does not “rest easy” if we stray from Him, he is grieved, He trembles in his innermost being; and he sets out to look for us, until He takes us back into his arms. The Lord does not calculate losses and risks; he has the heart of a father and a mother, and suffers for the lack of his beloved children. “But why does he suffer if this son is a scoundrel, if he has gone?” He suffers, he suffers. God suffers for our distance and when we go astray, he awaits our return. Remember: God always awaits us with open arms, whatever the situation in life in which we are lost may be. As a Psalm says, He will “neither slumber nor sleep”, he always watches over us (cf. 121, 4-5).

Let us look at ourselves now, and ask ourselves: do we imitate the Lord in this, that is, are we anxious about what is missing? Do we have nostalgia for those who are missing, who have drifted from Christian life? Do we carry this inner restlessness, or are we serene and undisturbed among ourselves? In other words, do we truly miss those who are missing from our communities, or do we pretend and not let it touch our hearts? Do I truly miss those who are missing in my life? Or are we comfortable among ourselves, calm and blissful in our groups – “I attend a very good apostolic group...” – without compassion for those who are far away? It is not a question merely of being “open to others”, it is the Gospel! The shepherd of the parable did not say, “I have another ninety-nine sheep, why should I waste time to go and look for the lost one?” Instead, he went to look. Let us then reflect on our relationships: do I pray for those who do not believe, who have drifted away, who are bitter? Do we attract those who are distant through the style of God, which is closeness, compassion and tenderness? The Father asks us to be attentive to the children he misses the most. Let us think of someone we know, who is close to us and has perhaps never heard anyone say, “You know, you are important to God”. “But I am in an irregular situation, I have done this bad thing, that one...”. “You are important to God”, say to him. “You are not searching for him, but he is searching for you”.

Let us – men and women with restless hearts – be troubled by these questions, and pray to Our Lady, mother who never tires of searching for and taking care of us, her children.

After the Angelus

The day after tomorrow, I will leave for a three-day journey in Kazakhstan, where I will take part in the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. It will be an opportunity to meet many religious representatives and to engage in dialogue as brothers, inspired by the mutual desire for peace, the peace our world thirsts for. I would already like to extend a cordial greeting to the participants, as well as to the authorities, the Christian communities and the entire population of that vast country. I give thanks for the preparations and for the work that has been done in view of my visit. I ask you all to accompany me with prayer on this pilgrimage of dialogue and peace.

Let us continue to pray for the Ukrainian people, that the Lord may give them comfort and hope. During these days, Cardinal Krajewski, prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, is in Ukraine to visit various communities and to bear concrete witness to the closeness of the Pope and the Church.

In this moment of prayer, it is dear to me to remember Sister Maria de Coppi, Combonian missionary, killed in Chipene, Mozambique, where she served with love for almost sixty years. May her witness give strength and courage to Christians and all the people of Mozambique.

I wish to address a special greeting to the dear people of Ethiopia, who today celebrate their traditional New Year: I assure you of my prayer and wish every family and the entire nation the gift of peace and reconciliation.

And let us not forget to pray to students, who go back to school tomorrow or the day after.

And now I greet you all, Romans and pilgrims from various countries: families, parish groups, associations. In particular, I greet the soldiers from Colombia, the group from Costa Rica and the Argentine female representation at the World Economic Forum. I greet the young people of the profession of faith of Cantù, the faithful of Musile di Piave, Ponte a Tressa and Vimercate, and the members of the Nonviolent Movement and the young people of the *Immacolata*.

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