



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

To each his own encounter

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Each man and woman has a personal encounter with the Lord. A true and actual encounter that can radically change one's life. The secret lies not only in being aware of it, but also in never forgetting it, so as to preserve its freshness and beauty. Pope Francis shared these thoughts during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, along with some homework and practical advice: pray for the grace to remember, and then read the Gospel once again, in order to recognize oneself in the many encounters of Jesus.

The First Reading (Acts 9:1-20), Francis began, recounts "the narrative of Saul — Paul", of his being "certain of his doctrine, even zealous". But "this zeal led him to persecute this new Way that was born there, namely Christians". Thus Saul "asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, for the authorization to put Christians in chains". And "he did this with the zeal of God".

Then, the Pope explained, "we all know what happens next". He has "that vision, and falls from the horse". At that point, Francis recalled, "the Lord speaks to him: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' — 'Who are you, Lord?' — 'I am Jesus'". This is "Paul's encounter with Jesus". Until that moment Paul "believed that everything the Christians were saying were stories". But "here he

encounters Him and will never forget this encounter: it changes his life and makes him grow in love for this Lord whom at first he persecuted but now loves". This encounter, the Pope added, leads Paul "to proclaim to the world the name of Jesus as an instrument of salvation". Thus, this is how "Paul's encounter with Jesus" happened and what it meant.

"In the Bible", Francis said, "there are many other encounters", and "in the Gospel" as well. They are "all different" and thus, truly, "each one has his own encounter with Jesus". Let us think about "the first disciples who followed Jesus and stayed with Him throughout the night — John and Andrew, the first meeting — and they were happy about this". Indeed, "Andrew went to his brother Peter — then called Simon — and said: 'We have found the Messiah!'". This was followed by "Peter's encounter with Jesus", when Jesus said to him: "'you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas', (which means rock)".

There really are many such "encounters", Francis reiterated. There is, for example, "that of Nathaniel, the sceptic". Straight away, "with only a few words, Jesus bowls him over". Indeed, the intellectual admits: "You are the Messiah!". Then there is "the encounter of the Samaritan woman who, at a certain point, feels herself in difficulty and tries to be a theologian: 'This mountain, the other...'". Jesus responds to her: "Your husband, your truth". The woman, "in her own sin, encounters Jesus and goes to proclaim him to those in the city: 'he told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'".

Francis also referred to "the encounter of one of the 10 healed lepers, who returned to express his gratitude". Another, "the encounter of that woman" who, sick for 12 years, "thought: 'if I only touch his garment, I shall be made well', and she encounters Jesus". And finally, also "the encounter of the possessed man from whom Jesus casts out many demons, which enter the swine". The man then "wants to follow Him and Jesus says to him: 'No, no, stay at home, but tell everyone what has happened to you'".

Thus, the Pontiff summarized, "we can find so many encounters in the Bible, because the Lord looks for us to have an encounter with us" and "each of us has his own encounter with Jesus". Perhaps, the Pope pointed out, "we forget it, we lose the memory", and we have to ask ourselves: "when did I encounter Jesus, or when did Jesus encounter me?". Surely, Francis said, Jesus "encountered you on the day of Baptism: that is true, you were a child". And with Baptism, he added, "He justified you and made you part of his people".

We all, the Pope stated, "have had some encounter with Him in our life", a true encounter, when "I felt that Jesus was looking at me". This experience is not only "for the holy". And "if we do not remember it, it will be beautiful to think back and ask the Lord to remind us, because He remembers, He recalls the encounter". In this regard Francis referred to the Book of Jeremiah, which reads: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride". Thus, it speaks of "that enthusiastic initial encounter, that new encounter: He never forgets, but we forget the encounter

with Jesus”.

Francis offered a “nice homework assignment”, asking them to recall “when I truly felt the Lord near me”, to think about “when I felt I needed to change my life or to be better or to forgive a person”, and “when I heard the Lord asking me something” and, thus, “when I encountered the Lord”.

Our faith is, in fact, “an encounter with Jesus”, and this is precisely “the foundation of faith: I encountered Jesus like Saul”, as offered in the passage from the day’s Reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Therefore, Francis continued, if one says to himself, “I don’t remember” my encounter with the Lord, then it is important to ask for this grace: “Lord, when did I consciously find you? When did you tell me something that changed my life or invited me to take that step forward in life?”. And, the Pope recommended “this is a fine prayer, do it every day”. Then, when “you remember, rejoice in that recollection, which is a remembrance of love”.

Francis also proposed another assignment, which “would be to take up the Gospels” and read again the many accounts there are in order “to see how Jesus encounters the people, how He chooses the apostles”. And realize, perhaps, that some encounters “resemble mine”, for “each one has her own” encounter.

Thus, the Pope offered two practical and concrete suggestions “that will do us good”. First of all “pray and ask for the grace of memory”. And then ask yourself: “When, Lord, was that encounter, that love I had at first?”. In order “not to feel that rebuke that the Lord gives in Revelation: ‘I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first’”.

The Pope’s second suggestion was to “take up the Gospel and see Jesus’ many encounters with so many different people”. It is obvious, he explained, that “the Lord wants to encounter us, He wants a face-to-face relationship with us”. For certain, “in our life there was a strong encounter that led us to change our life somewhat and to be better”.

The Eucharistic celebration, the Pontiff concluded, is indeed “another encounter with Jesus in order to carry out what we have heard” in the Gospel (Jn 6:52-59): “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”. Yes, to so abide “in the Lord, let us now go toward this daily encounter”.
