



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A surprising embrace

Friday, 8 January 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 2, 15 January 2016)

The Holy Year of Mercy reminds us that “God always loves first”, unconditionally, and he welcomes us just as we are, by embracing us and forgiving us like a father. At Mass on Friday morning, Pope Francis addressed especially those who acknowledge themselves as sinners, reminding them of the certainty of God’s love.

The Apostle John, the Pontiff began, “continues to speak to the early Christians about the two commandments that Jesus taught us: to love God and love our neighbour”. In the passage from the First Letter of John proposed in the day’s Liturgy (4:7-10), we read: “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God”. And, Francis noted, “this word, ‘love’, is a word that is often used but, when you use it, you don’t know exactly what it means”. What then, is love? Sometimes, the Pope said, “we think of the love in soap operas: no, that doesn’t seem like love. Or love might seem like enthusiasm for a person, which then burns out”.

The real question then, is: “where does true love come from?”. John writes: “he who loves is born of God”, for “God is love”. The Apostle does not say: “all love is God”. He says instead: “God is love”. John continues, saying that “God loved us so much that he ‘sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him’”. Thus, “God gives his life in Jesus, in order to give us life”,

Francis affirmed. “Love is beautiful, to love is beautiful, and in heaven there will be only love, charity. So says Paul”. And if love “is beautiful, one is always strengthened and grows in the gift of one’s own life: one grows by giving of oneself to others”.

Francis then reread another passage of the Letter of John: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us”. This confirms that “God loved us first; he gave us life out of love, he gave life and his Son out of love”. Therefore, “when we find God, there is always a surprise: it is first he who waits for us; it is he who finds us”.

With reference to a passage taken from the Gospel according to Mark, which recounts the episode of the multiplication of loaves (6:34-44), the Pope asked that we look to Jesus. “Those people followed him to listen to him, because he spoke like one with authority, not like the scribes”, Francis explained. “He looked at those people and went further. Precisely because he loved, the Gospel says, ‘he had compassion on them’, which is not the same as having pity”. The correct word is “compassion: love led him to ‘suffer with’ them, to be involved in the people’s life”. And, Francis said, “the Lord is always there, loving first: he is waiting for us, he is the surprise”.

This is precisely what happens, the Pope recalled, to “Andrew when he goes to Peter to tell him: ‘We have found the Messiah, come!’. Peter goes, and Jesus looks at him and says to him: ‘Are you Simon? You shall be Peter’. He was waiting for him with a mission. [Jesus] loved him first”.

The same happens “when Zacchaeus, who was small, climbs the tree to better see Jesus”, who “passes by, lifts his eyes and says: ‘Zacchaeus, come down, I want to go to supper at your house’. Zacchaeus, who wanted to meet Jesus, realizes that Jesus had been waiting for him”.

Francis then recalled the story of Nathanael who, “a bit skeptical, goes to see the one whom they say is the Messiah”. Jesus says to him: “when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”. So, “God always loves first”. The idea is also recalled in the parable of the Prodigal Son: “when the son — who had spent all of his father’s inheritance on vices — returned home, he realized that his father had been waiting for him. God is always waiting for us first. Before us, always. And when the other son didn’t want to come to the feast, because he did not understand his father’s attitude, his father went to find him. And God is this way with us: he loves us first, always”.

Thus, the Pope said, “we can see in the Gospel how God loves: when we have something in our heart and we want to ask the Lord’s forgiveness, it is he who is waiting for us, to grant forgiveness”.

This Year of Mercy, Francis said, is also in part so “that we may know that the Lord is awaiting us, each of us”. He is waiting “to embrace us, nothing more, in order to say: ‘Son, daughter, I love you. I let my Son be crucified for you; this is the value of my love; this is the gift of love’”.

The Pope recommended that this truth always be pondered: “The Lord is waiting for me, the Lord wants me to open the door of my heart, because he is there waiting to enter”. It is unconditional.

Of course, someone might say: “Father, no, no, I would like to, but I have so many ugly things inside!”. Francis’ response to this was clear: “It is better! Better! Because he is waiting for you, just as you are, not as they tell you that “one should be”. You should be as you are. This is how he loves you, he embraces you, kisses you, forgives you”.

The Pope then offered a concluding exhortation, inviting us to go with haste to the Lord and say: “Lord, you know that I love you”. Or if “I don’t feel like it, to say this: ‘Lord, you know that I would like to love you, but I am such a sinful man, such a sinful woman”. Do so with the certainty that he will do as the father did “with the Prodigal Son who spent all his money on vices. I will not let you finish your speech, I will silence you with an embrace: the embrace of God’s love”.