



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Beatitudes in reverse

Monday, 12 June

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If we simply leave the door of our heart “a bit” ajar, “God manages to enter”, saving us from joining the ranks of the “unmerciful”. This is the antidote for those who lack mercy and who practice the Beatitudes “in reverse”. During Mass at Santa Marta on Monday, 12 June, Pope Francis shared this idea and warned against the temptation of “self-referential narcissism”, the very opposite of that Christian “otherness” which is both “a gift and a service”.

Referring to the day’s first reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (1:1-7), the Holy Father immediately noted that within just 19 lines of text, “Saint Paul speaks eight times of comfort, of allowing ourselves to be comforted so that we may comfort others”. The word ‘comfort’, thus, “occurs eight times within 19 lines: it’s too strong; he is trying to tell us something”. Therefore, Pope Francis took this as “an opportunity, an occasion to reflect on comfort”, to ask: “what is the comfort which Paul speaks about?”. The Pontiff noted that “first of all, we must see that comforting is not autonomous; it is not something closed in on itself”.

In fact, he said, “the experience of comforting, which is a spiritual experience, always needs ‘otherness’ in order to be complete; no one can comfort himself, no one”. And “whoever tries to do so, ends up looking in the mirror: he looks in the mirror, seeking to mask himself, to appear” a

certain way. “He is comforted by these closed things that prevent him from growing, and the air which he breathes is the air of self-referential narcissism”. However, this is a “mask” of “comfort which does not allow growth; it is not comfort because it is closed; it lacks ‘otherness’”, that sharing with an ‘other’.

“In the Gospel we find many people like this”, Pope Francis explained. “For example, the doctors of the law are full of their own sufficiency”. They are “closed, and this is ‘their comfort’ in quotation marks”. The Pope made explicit reference to the rich man “who lived from one party to the next”, and thus, felt “he was comforted”. However, this type of attitude is best expressed by the words of the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican before the altar: “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men”. In other words, he “was looking at himself in the mirror, looking at his soul ‘masked’ with ideologies, and he was thanking the Lord”. Jesus himself “shows us the possibility” of the existence of “these people who will never attain fullness with this lifestyle but at best will arrive at being ‘puffed-up’, in other words, vanity”.

For “comfort” to be true, to be Christian, it needs “otherness”, an ‘other’. This, Pope Francis explained, is because “true comfort is *received*”. For this reason “Paul began with that blessing: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort’. And “it is precisely the Lord; it is God who comforts us; it is God who gives us this gift: to us with our heart open, he comes and gives it to us”. This is “the ‘otherness’ which allows true comfort to grow; and the true comfort of the soul also matures into another ‘otherness’, so that we may comfort others”. Therefore, that “comfort is a state of passage from the gift received to the service rendered”, and thus, “true comforting has this twofold ‘otherness’: it is both a gift and a service”.

Thus, the Holy Father reiterated, “if I allow the Lord’s comfort to enter as a gift, it is because I need to be comforted: I am needy”. In fact, in order “to be comforted it is necessary to recognize being needy: only thus will the Lord come, comforting us and giving us the mission to comfort others”. Certainly, Pope Francis recognized, “it is not easy to have a heart that is open to receive the gift and to serve others, the twofold ‘otherness’ that makes comforting possible”.

“It is Jesus himself who explains what I have to do in order to keep my heart open”, the Pope explained. “An open heart is a happy heart and in the Gospel we have heard who are the happy ones, who are the blessed: the poor”. Thus, “the heart opens with an attitude of poverty, poverty of the spirit: those who know how to weep, the meek, meekness of heart; those who hunger for justice, who fight for justice; those who are merciful, who have mercy towards others; the pure of heart; the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for justice, for love of justice”. And “in this way the heart opens and the Lord comes with his gift of comfort and the mission to comfort others”.

However, there are also those who “have a closed heart: they are unhappy because the gift of

comfort cannot enter and cannot be given to others”. They do not follow the Beatitudes and “they feel rich in spirit, or rather, self-sufficient”. These are the people “who have no need to weep because they feel they are just; those violent ones who do not know what meekness is: those who are unjust, who live off injustice and create injustice; the ‘unmerciful’ or rather those without mercy — who never forgive and who never have the need to forgive because they do not feel the need to be forgiven; those unclean of heart; those workers of war, not of peace; and those who are never criticized or persecuted for fighting for justice, because they do not care about the injustices done to other people: these people are closed”.

Therefore, considering these ‘beatitudes in reverse’, the Holy Father suggested that it would be “good for us to think today” about “how my heart is: is it open? Do I know how to receive the gift of comfort, do I ask it of the Lord, and then do I know how to give it to others as a gift of the Lord and as my service?”. And “thus, with these thoughts throughout the day, go back and thank the Lord who is so good and is always trying to comfort us”. Let us remember that God “only asks that the door of our hearts be open, at least a bit, so that he can then manage to find a way to enter”.