



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Like blowing on the embers

Saturday, 21 September 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 40, 2 October 2013)

“A gaze that makes you develop and keep on going, that encourages you, because it makes you feel that he loves you” and transmits the necessary courage to follow him. The gazes of Jesus were the topic of Pope Francis’ meditation in the Mass in the Chapel of Santa Marta in the Domus Sanctae Marthae on Saturday, 21 September. This date is fundamental in life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, for on this day, the liturgical Feast of St Matthew, 60 years ago — 21 September 1953 — that he made this life choice. This may also be why, in commenting on the account of the Evangelist’s conversion (Mt 9:9-13), the Pope emphasized how the power of Christ’s gaze can change the life of those on whom it rests.

This was exactly what happened to the tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus: “I find it a little difficult to understand how Matthew was able to hear the voice of Jesus” in the midst of such a large throng. Indeed, the Bishop of Rome is not certain that he heard the voice of the Nazarene. However, he is certain that in his call in his heart he felt the gaze of Jesus looking at him.

Then another action in the scene is described: “As soon as he felt that gaze in his heart, he rose to his feet and followed him”. This is why the Pope pointed out that “Jesus’ gaze always uplifts us” it raises us: he never “leaves us there”, where we were before we met him. Nor does he take

something from us: “He never lowers you, never humiliates you, he invites you to stand up”. And making you feel his love he gives you the courage you need in order to follow him.

So this was the Pope’s question: “but what was Jesus’ gaze like”? It suffices to think of “how he looked at the sick and healed them”, or at “how he looked at the crowd of people that had moved him, for he felt it resembled a flock without a shepherd”. And above all, we must not only reflect on “how Jesus gazed”, but also on “what feelings his gaze stirred in those he looked at”. Because, he explained, “each one felt he was being looked at by Jesus”, as if he were calling each by his own name.

For this reason Christ’s look “changes life”, the life of everyone and in every situation. And it does so too, Pope Francis added, in difficult moments and at moments of misgiving. Lastly there is “Jesus’ last gaze” with which, from the Cross, “he looked at his mother and looked at his disciple”; with that look “he told us that his mother was ours: and that the Church is mother”. For this reason “it will do us good to think and pray about this gaze of Jesus and also to let us be looked at by him”.

Pope Francis then returned to the Gospel scene that followed. Jesus was seated at table with publicans and sinners. “Rumours spread and the whole of society — not a ‘clean’ society — felt invited to that lunch”, Pope Francis commented, because “Jesus had looked at them and his gaze upon them was like breathing upon embers, they felt fire within them”; and they also experienced “that Jesus was uplifting them” he was raising them, “he restored them to dignity”, because “Jesus’ gaze always makes us dignified, it gives us dignity.

Lastly the Pope identified a final characteristic in Jesus’ gaze: generosity. He was a teacher who ate with the filth of the city but who also knew that “beneath the filth were the embers of a desire for God”, anxious that someone “might help them to burst into flame”. And this is exactly what Jesus’ gaze did then as it does today. “I believe that in our life we have all felt this gaze”, said Pope Francis, “and not just once but very often. Perhaps in the person of a priest who was teaching us doctrine or was pardoning our sins, perhaps in the help of friendly people”. And especially, “we all find ourselves facing that gaze, that marvellous gaze”. We therefore move “onwards through life in the certainty that he is looking at us and waiting to gaze upon us once and for all. Jesus’ last gaze upon our life will be forever, it will be eternal”. In order to have it we can ask in prayer “all the saints who have been gazed upon by Jesus” to “prepare us to let ourselves look through life and also for that last gaze of Jesus”.