



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION
AT THE TOMB OF BLESSED JOHN PAUL II
IN THE VATICAN BASILICA

Two icons and a question

Thursday, 31 October 2013

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 45, 8 November 2013)

There are two striking elements in these readings. The first is Paul's certitude: "No one shall separate me from the love of Christ". He loved the Lord so much — for he had seen Him, he had found Him, the Lord had changed his life — he so loved Him that he said that nothing could separate him from Him. The Lord's love was the very heart and centre of Paul's life. Despite persecution, illness, betrayal, everything that he experienced, even all the things that happened to him during his life, none of them could separate him from the love of Christ. This was the very centre of Paul's life, the touchstone. The love of Christ. And we cannot be Christian without Christ's love, without living in this love, without acknowledging it, without nourishing ourselves on this love: the Christian is the one who knows that the Lord is looking upon him with that very beautiful gaze, he knows that the Lord loves him and loves him to the very end. He knows and feels it... The Christian knows that his life has been saved through the blood of Christ. And this is what love does: it creates this relationship of love.

This is the first element that I find so striking. The second thing that strikes me is Jesus' sadness when he looks at Jerusalem. "But you, O Jerusalem, who have not understood love". She did not understand God's tenderness, illustrated with the beautiful image [of a hen gathering her brood

under her wings] of which Jesus speaks. Not to understand God's love: it is the opposite of what Paul felt. Ah yes, God loves me, God loves us, but it remains abstract, it isn't something that touches my heart, and I make do in life as best I can. There is no fidelity there. And this was the cry of Jesus' heart as he wept over Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, you are not faithful; you did not allow yourself to love; and you entrusted yourself to so many idols that promised you everything, that told you they would give you everything, and then they abandoned you". Jesus' heart, Jesus' suffering love: a love that is neither accepted nor received. These are the two icons set before us today: Paul, who remains faithful to Jesus' love to the very end, finding in that love the strength to proceed, to endure everything. He feels his own weakness, he knows that he is a sinner but he finds strength in God's love, in the encounter he had had with Jesus Christ. Set against this, there is the faithless, unfaithful city and people who do not accept Jesus' love, or worse yet, eh? Who live this love half heartedly: sometimes "yes", sometimes "no" based on their self-interests.

Let us look at Paul whose courage comes from this love, and let us look at Jesus who weeps over that city, that is unfaithful. Let us look at the fidelity of Paul and at the infidelity of Jerusalem and at the centre let us look at Jesus, at his heart which loves us so much. What are we to make of it? The question is: who do I resemble more, Paul or Jerusalem? Is my love for God very strong like Paul's or is my heart a lukewarm heart like that of Jerusalem? May the Lord, through the intercession of Blessed John Paul II, help us to respond to this question. So be it!