



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Forgiveness in a caress

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis reflected on the day's Readings from the Book of the Prophet Daniel (13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62) and the Gospel of John (8:1-11). The Pope introduced his comments by noting that: "today's readings speak to us about adultery", which together with blasphemy and idolatry was considered to be "an extremely grave sin in the Law of Moses" that was punishable by death. Adultery, the Pope said, "is contrary to the image of God and God's fidelity", for "marriage, in addition to being a human reality, is the symbol of God's faithful relationship with his people". Thus, "when marriage is ruined through adultery, it sullies God's relationship with his people". In those days, it was considered to be "a grave sin" because "is sullied the symbol of the relationship between God and his people, of God's fidelity".

In the Gospel, the Evangelist John recounts the story of the woman caught in adultery. Here, the Pope said, "we encounter Jesus seated among many people ... teaching". As he was teaching "the scribes and Pharisees approached him bringing a woman forward, perhaps with her hands bound.... Placing her in the midst, they began accusing her: she is an adulteress!". The Gospel reports that they then asked Jesus a question: "What ought we do with this woman? You speak to us about goodness, yet Moses told us that we must kill her!". The Pope explained that "they were saying this in order to put him to the test, to have a reason to accuse him". For, "if Jesus has said 'yes', go ahead with the stoning", it would have provided them the opportunity to say to the people: "but this is your good teacher, look what he has done to this poor woman!". If instead "Jesus had

said: poor woman, forgive her!", then they would have grounds to accuse him "of not fulfilling the law".

Their sole objective was "to put [Jesus] to the test and to trap him. The woman didn't matter to them; the adulterers didn't matter to them". Indeed, the Pope said, "perhaps some of them were adulterers themselves". For his part, although there were many people around, "Jesus wanted to remain alone with the woman, he wanted to speak to the woman's heart: this was the most important thing for Jesus". And "the people slowly went away" after they heard the words: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her".

"With a certain irony, the Gospel says that everyone went away, one by one, beginning with the elders: it is evident that they had a big debt against them in the bank of heaven!", the Pope remarked. Then comes "the moment of Jesus, the Confessor". He was left alone with the woman standing before him. "Jesus was bending down and was writing with his finger on the ground. Some exegetes say that Jesus was writing the sins of the Pharisees and scribes". Then "he got up and looked" at the woman, who was "full of shame, and he said to her: Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? We are alone, you and I. You are standing before God, without accusations, without gossip: you and God".

The woman does not claim to be the victim of "a false accusation", she does not defend herself, saying: "I didn't commit adultery". No, "she acknowledges her sin" and she responds to Jesus, saying: "No one has condemned me, Lord". Then Jesus says to her: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again, in order not to pass through a time of disgrace, in order not to experience such shame, in order not to offend God, in order not to sully the beautiful relationship between God and his people".

"Jesus forgives. But there is something more here than forgiveness. For as a confessor Jesus goes beyond the law, for "the law said that she had to be punished". Indeed, as the Pope noted, Jesus "was pure and could have thrown the first stone". But he "went beyond this. He doesn't tell her that adultery is not a sin, but he doesn't condemn her with the law". This, the Pope explained, is "the mystery of Jesus' mercy ... in being merciful Jesus" goes beyond "the law which commanded that she be stoned". "Mercy," the Pope explained, "is something which is difficult to understand: it doesn't eliminate sin", for "it is God's forgiveness" that does this. "Mercy is the manner in which God forgives". For "Jesus could have said: 'I forgive you, go!' as he had said to the paralytic: your sins are forgiven!". In this situation, however, "Jesus goes further" and counsels the woman "to sin no more".

"How many of us would deserve to be condemned! And it would even be just. Yet he forgives!". How?, the Pope asked. "With this mercy", which "does not eliminate sin: it is God's forgiveness that eliminates it", whereas "mercy goes beyond". Pope Francis then compared God's mercy to the sun: "we look at the sky, the many stars, but when the morning sun comes, we don't see the

stars. Such is the mercy of God: it is a great light of love, of tenderness". For "God doesn't forgive with a decree but with a caress". He forgives by "caressing the wounds caused by our sins, because he is involved in forgiveness, is involved in our salvation".

This is Jesus' style as a confessor, the Pope said. He does not humiliate the adulterous woman. "He does not say to her: what did you do, when did you do it, how did you do it and with whom did you do it!". Instead, he tells her "to go and sin no more: God's mercy is great, God's mercy is great: forgiving us by caressing us".