



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Thursday, 8 January 2015

The Holy Father celebrated the morning Mass at Santa Marta in suffrage for victims of the cruel terrorist attack in Paris:

The attack in Paris yesterday makes us think of so much cruelty, human cruelty; of so much terrorism, both of isolated acts of terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism. The cruelty that man is capable of! Let us pray at this Mass for the victims of this cruelty. So many! And let us also ask for the cruel ones, that the Lord may change their hearts

May the Lord change the hearts of the cruel

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 2, 9 January 2015)

In these days, the Pope noted in his homily, “the key word in the liturgy is ‘manifestation’: the Son of God manifests Himself in the Feast of the Epiphany, to the Gentiles; in Baptism, when the Holy Spirit descends upon Him; in the wedding at Cana, when he performs the miracle of changing water into wine”.

Indeed, “these are the three signs that the liturgy brings in these days in order to speak to us about the manifestation of God: God makes Himself known”. But “the question is this: how can we know God?” And with this, Francis referred to the day’s First Reading (1 Jn 4:7-10), specifically, “the theme that the Apostle John takes up in the First Reading: knowledge of God”. Thus, “what

does it mean to know God? How can one know God?”.

To these questions, the Pope answered, “a first reply would be: one can know God through reason”. But really, “can I know God through reason? Somewhat, yes”. Indeed, “through my intellect, reasoning, looking at worldly things, one can begin to understand that there is a God and the existence of God can be understood in some of God’s personality traits”. However, the Pope stated, “this is insufficient for knowing God”, in so far as “God is known totally in the encounter with Him, and reason alone does not suffice for the encounter, something more is needed: reason helps you to reach a certain point, then He accompanies you onward”.

In his letter, “John clearly states what God is: God is love”. For this reason, “only on the path of love can you know God”. Of course, the Pope added, “reasonable love, accompanied by reason, but love”. Perhaps one could ask at this point “how can I love whom I don’t know?”. The answer is clear: “Love those whom you have near”. In fact, “this is the doctrine of two commandments: the most important one is to love God, for He is love”. The second “is to love your neighbour, but to get to the first, we have to climb the steps of the second”. In a word, Pope Francis explained, “through love of our neighbour, we come to know God, who is love” and “only by loving reasonably, but by loving, we can reach this love”.

Francis then repeated the words that John wrote: “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God”. But, the Pontiff recalled “you cannot love if God doesn’t give the love, doesn’t generate this love for you” because “he who loves knows God”. On the contrary, St John writes, “he who does not love does not know God; for God is love”. The Pope pointed out that this is not “soap opera love”, but rather “sound, strong love”, an “eternal love that manifests itself — these days the word is ‘manifest’ — in his Son who has come to save us”. It is, therefore, a “concrete love, a love of works and not of words”. It is here, then, that “it takes a lifetime to know God: a journey, a journey of love, of knowledge, of love for our neighbour, of love for those who hate us, of love for all”.

Pope Francis then indicated that Jesus himself “gave us the example of love”. And, indeed, “in this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us first and sent his Son to be the victim of expiation for our sins”. This is why “we are able to contemplate the love of God in the person of Jesus”. And “by doing what Jesus taught us about love for our neighbour, we reach — step by step — the love of God, knowledge of God who is love”.

The Pope pointed out that the Apostle John, in his letter, “goes a little ahead” when he states that “in this is love” and “not that we loved God, but that He loved us first: God precedes us in love”. In fact, Francis noted, “when I meet God in prayer, I feel that God loved me before I began to seek Him”. Yes, “He is always first, He waits for us, He calls us”. And “when we arrive, He is there!”.

In this regard, the Pope referred to another passage from Scripture (Jer 1:11-12), and said: “How

beautiful were God's words to Jeremiah: 'Jeremiah, what do you see?' — 'a rod of almond, Lord' — 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it'. Francis explained that "the flower of the almond tree is the first to blossom in spring, the first". This signifies that "the Lord is there, watching over", and He is always "the first, like the almond tree, He loves us first". And we, too, the Pope assured us, "will always have this surprise: when we draw near to God through works of charity, through prayer, in Communion, in the Word of God, we find that He is there, first, waiting for us, this is how He loves us". And just "like the flower of the almond tree, He is the first". Truly, Francis remarked, "that verse from Jeremiah tells us so much".

A similar proposal can be gleaned from the episode presented in today's Reading from the Gospel according to Mark (6:34-44), which first says that "Jesus had compassion on the crowd of people, it is the love of Jesus: He saw a large crowd, like sheep without a shepherd, confused". But today as well, Francis recalled, there are "so many confused people in our cities, in our countries: so many people".

When "Jesus saw these confused people He was moved: He began to teach them the doctrine, the matters of God and the people heard Him, listened to Him very closely because the Lord was good at speaking, He spoke to the heart".

Then, Mark recounts in his Gospel that, realizing that those 5,000 people hadn't eaten, Jesus asks his disciples to see to it. Thus, Christ "is first to go meet with the people". Perhaps on their part, "the disciples got somewhat upset, felt annoyed, and their response was harsh: 'shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?'. Thus, "God's love was first; the disciples hadn't understood". But God's love is really like this: "He is always waiting for us, He always surprises us". It is "the Father, our Father who loves us so much, who is always ready to forgive us, always. And not once, but 70 times seven. Always!". Indeed, "like a Father full of love". Therefore, "in order to know this God who is love, we must climb the steps of love for our neighbour, by works of charity, by the acts of mercy that our Lord has taught us".

Francis concluded by praying "that the Lord, in these days in which the Church makes us ponder the manifestation of God, grant us the grace to know Him on the path of love".