



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

A father's caress

Thursday, 10 December 2015

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 51, 18 December 2015)

A father or a mother says to their child: “Do not be afraid, I am here” and pampers the child with caresses. This is the privileged condition of humanity: small, weak, but reassured, supported and forgiven by a God who loves them. At the beginning of the Jubilee, Pope Francis took the opportunity to return to the theme of the Father’s mercy while reflecting on the daily Liturgy in the Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning. The Cardinal Advisors also participated in the Mass.

The reflection was inspired by the Responsorial Psalm, which repeated: “The Lord is merciful and great in love”. The Pope called it “a confession of faith” in which the Christian recognizes that God “is mercy, and he is great, but great in love”. This statement is simple only in appearance, because “understanding the mercy of God is a mystery, it is a journey that must be made throughout life”.

In order to help to better enter into this mystery, the Pope referred to the Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (41:13-20), which is God’s monologue to his people. It tells of how God “told his people that he had chosen them not because they were great or powerful”, but “because they were the smallest of all, the poorest of all”. Pope Francis explained that God is truly “in love with this poverty”, with this “littleness”.

It is a text from which this love clearly emerges: “a tender love, a love like that of a father or mother” speaking to their child “who wakes up during the night frightened by a dream”. God speaks with the same concern to his people and says: “I will hold your right hand, rest assured, fear not”. Using imagery to describe the condition of littleness, he continues: “You worm of Jacob, you men of Israel, I will help you, your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, fear not”.

Do not be afraid. With regard to these words, the Pope returned to the example of family life: “We all know the caresses of a mother and father, when children are restless with fear”. Parents too say: “Don’t be afraid, I am here”. The Lord reminds each one of us, tenderly: “I am in love with your littleness, with your nothingness”, and he tells us: “Do not be afraid of your sins, I love you so much, I am here to forgive you”. This, in essence, the Pope explained, “is God’s mercy”.

Continuing his reflection, Pope Francis gave the example of a saint (“I think it was St Jerome, but I am not sure”, he confided), recalling how the saint was said to have been very penitent in his life, offering sacrifices and prayers, and that God always asked more of him. The saint continued to ask: “Lord what can I give you?”, until he said, “But Lord, I have nothing more to give you, I have given you everything”. And the answer he received was: “No, one thing is missing” — “What is missing Lord?” — “Give me your sins”. With this story, the Pope sought to emphasize that “the Lord wants to take our weaknesses, our sins and our weariness, upon himself”. It is an approach that we also find in the Gospels, in Jesus, who said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and tired and I will give you rest”. Francis said that God repeats it over and over again: “I am the Lord your God who will hold your right hand, fear not little one, do not be afraid. I will give you strength. Give me everything and I will forgive you, I will give you peace”. These, the Pope added, are “God’s caresses”, the caresses “of our Father, when he expresses himself with his mercy”.

We men, the Pontiff continued, “are so nervous” and “when something does not go well, we shout and we are impatient”. While God instead comforts us: “Do not worry, you’ve made a big mistake, yes, but do not worry; don’t be afraid, I forgive you”. In this way he welcomes us entirely, even with our mistakes and our sins. This is precisely what is repeated in the Psalm: “The Lord is merciful and great in love”. Thus, the Pope said in conclusion, “we are small. He has given us everything. He asks us only for our miseries, our littleness and our sins, to embrace and caress us”.

Recalling the prayer recited at the beginning of the Mass, “Lord, awaken the faith of your people”, Francis concluded by inviting everyone to ask the Lord “to awaken in all of us, and in all the people, faith in this fatherhood, in this mercy, in his heart”, and to ask that “this faith in his fatherhood and mercy” makes us “a bit more merciful toward others”.
