



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAEHOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Our God is close and asks us to be close to each other"

Wednesday, 18 March 2020

[[Multimedia](#)]

Introduction

Today let us pray for the deceased, for those who have died because of the virus. In particular, I would like us to pray for the medical personnel who have died in these days. They have given their lives in service to the sick.

Homily

The theme of both of today's readings is the law (cf. *Dt* 4:1,5-9; *Mt* 5:17-19): the law that God gives to His people, the Law that the Lord wanted to give to us and that Jesus wished to bring to its ultimate perfection. But there is something that attracts attention: the *way* in which God gives the law. Moses says: "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?" (*Dt* 4:7). The Lord gives the law to His people with an attitude of *closeness*. They are not the prescriptions of a governor, who may be far-off, or of a dictator... No. There is closeness. And we know through revelation that there is a paternal nearness of a father accompanying His people, giving them the gift of the law. A God who is near. Indeed, "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?"

Our God is the God of closeness. He is a God who is near, who walks with His people. That image of the desert, in Exodus: the cloud and the column of fire to protect the people. He walks with His people. He is not a God who leaves the prescriptions of the law in writing and then goes His own

way. He writes the prescriptions with His own hand on the rock. Then He gives them, hands them over to Moses. He doesn't give them and then go on His own way. He walks, He is close. "What great nation is there that has its gods so near?" It is closeness. Our God is a God of closeness.

And the first response of man, in the first pages of the Bible, consists of two attitudes of non-closeness. Our response is always to distance ourselves. We distance ourselves from God. He comes close to us and we pull away. Those first two pages. The first reaction of Adam with his wife is to hide. They hide themselves from God's closeness. They are ashamed, because they have sinned. Sin leads us to hide ourselves, to not want nearness. (cf. *Gn 3:8-10*). So many times we adopt a theology thinking of a God who is a judge. And so I hide myself, I am afraid. The second human reaction before this proposal of God's closeness, is to kill. To kill one's brother. "I am not my brother's keeper" (cf. *Gn 4:9*).

Two types of reaction that inhibit every type of nearness. Man rejects God's nearness. He wants to be in control of relationships. And relationships always bring with them some type of vulnerability. God draws near making Himself weak. And the closer He comes, the weaker He seems to be. When He comes to live among us, He makes Himself man, one of us. He makes Himself weak. He bears that weakness even unto death, the most cruel death, the death at the hands of murderers, the death of the worst sinners. God humbles Himself when He draws near. He humbles Himself to be with us, to walk with us, to help us.

The "God who is near" speaks to us of humility. He is not a "great God", no. He is nearby. He is at home. We see this in Jesus, God made man, close to us even unto death. His disciples accompany Him, He teaches them, He lovingly corrects them... Let us think, for example, of Jesus' closeness to the anguished disciples of Emmaus: they were anguished, defeated, and He drew close to them slowly, to allow them to understand the message of life, of the resurrection (cf. *Lk 24:13-32*).

Our God is close and asks us to be close to each other, not to distance ourselves from one another. In this moment of crisis because of the pandemic we are experiencing, this nearness begs to be manifested more, to be seen more. Perhaps we cannot draw near physically to others because of the fear of contagion, but we can reawaken in ourselves a habit of drawing near to others through prayer, through help. There are many ways of drawing near. And why must be close to each other? Because our God is near. He wished to accompany us in life. He is the God of closeness. For this reason we are not persons in isolation. We are near to each other, because the inheritance we have received from the Lord is closeness, that is, the gesture of closeness.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace of being near to each other; not to hide ourselves from each other, not to wash our hands of others' problems as Cain did, no. Closeness. Proximity. Nearness. Indeed, "What great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?" (*Dt 4:7*)

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