



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Three manners of gaze

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“How does Jesus gaze at me today?”. Francis posed this question, which directly challenges each Christian with the same force of the Lord’s gaze upon Peter on three occasions to discern the “enthusiasm of the vocation, the remorse and the mission”. The Holy Father explained this during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning.

The passage which recounts the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, the Pontiff noted, “is almost at the end of John’s Gospel” (21:15-19). “We always remember”, he continued, “the story of that night of fishing”, when “the disciples hadn’t caught any fish, nothing”. And “they were rather upset” about this. This is why, “when they were nearing the bank” and heard a man ask if they had “something to eat”, they replied angrily: “No!”. Because truly, “they hadn’t caught anything”. But this man told them to cast the net on the other side: the disciples did so “and the net filled up with fish”.

It is “John, the closest friend, who recognizes the Lord”. For his part, “Peter, the enthusiast, jumps into the sea to reach the Lord first”. It truly is “a miraculous catch”, Francis observed, “but when they arrive — and here begins today’s Gospel passage — they find that Jesus has prepared breakfast, there is fish on the grill”. Thus they eat together, and then, “after they’ve eaten, the

dialogue between Jesus and Peter begins”.

“Today while praying”, the Pope confided, “it came to my heart, it came to me how Jesus looked at Peter”. And in the Gospel, Francis added, “I found three different manners of Jesus’ gaze upon Peter”.

The first, the Pope noted, is found “at the beginning of the Gospel according to John, when Andrew goes to his brother Peter and says to him: “We have found the Messiah”. And “he brings him to Jesus”, who “fixes his gaze on him and says: ‘You are Simon, son of John. You shall be called Peter”. This is “the first gaze, the gaze of the mission” which will be explained “further ahead in Caesarea Philippi”. There, Jesus says: ““You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church’: this will be your mission”.

The Pope continued, explaining that “in the meantime, Peter has become an enthusiast of Jesus: he follows Jesus. Let us remember that passage from the Sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to John, when Jesus speaks of eating his body and so many disciples say at that moment: ‘This is hard, this word is difficult’”. Thus, “they begin to withdraw”. Jesus then “looks at the disciples and says: ‘Do you want to leave too?’”. And it is “Peter who responds: ‘No! Where would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!’”. This is “the enthusiasm of Peter”. Thus, Francis explained, “there is the first gaze: the vocation and the first declaration of the mission”. And, “how is Peter’s spirit under that first gaze? Enthusiastic”. It is his “first time to go with the Lord”.

Then, the Pope added, “I thought of the second gaze”. We find it “late at night on Holy Thursday, when Peter wants to follow Jesus and approaches where He is, in the house of the priest, in prison, but he is recognized: “No, I don’t know him!””. He denies Him “three times”. Then “he hears the cock crow and remembers: he denied the Lord. He lost everything. He lost his love”. Precisely “in that moment, Jesus is led to another room, across the courtyard, and fixes his gaze on Peter”. The Gospel of Luke recounts that “Peter cried bitterly”. Thus, “that enthusiasm to follow Jesus has become remorse, for he has sinned, he has denied Jesus”. However, “that gaze transforms Peter’s heart, more than before”. Thus “the first transformation is the change of name and of vocation. Instead “the second gaze is a gaze that changes the heart and is a change of conversion to love”.

“We don’t know what the gaze was like in that encounter, alone, after the Resurrection”, Francis stated. “We know that Jesus encountered Peter, the Gospel says, but we don’t know what they said”. Therefore, the narrative in today’s liturgy “is a third gaze: the confirmation of the mission; but also the gaze in which Jesus asks for confirmation of Peter’s love”. Indeed “three times — three times! — Peter had denied” Him; and now the Lord “for the third time asks him to show his love”. And “each time, when Peter says yes, that he loves Him, he loves Him, He gives him the mission: ‘Feed my lambs, tend my sheep’”. Moreover, at the third question — “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” — Peter “was grieved, nearly weeping”. He was sorry because “for the third time” the

Lord “asked him, ‘Do you love me?’”. And he answered Him: “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you”. And Jesus replied: “Feed my sheep”. This is “the third gaze: the gaze of the mission”.

Francis then returned to the essence of the Lord gazing three times at Peter: “The first, the gaze of the choice, with the enthusiasm to follow Jesus; the second, the gaze of remorse at the moment of that sin so great of having denied Jesus; the third gaze is the gaze of mission: ‘Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep’. But “it doesn’t end there: you did this for love and then? Will you receive a crown? No”. Instead, the Lord stated clearly: “I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go”. As if to say: “You too, like me, will be in that courtyard where I fixed my gaze on you, near the cross”.

The Pope then proposed an examination of conscience on this point. “We too can consider: how does Jesus gaze at me today? How does Jesus look at me? With a call? With forgiveness? With a mission?”. We are certain that “on the path that He made, we all are under Jesus’ gaze: He always looks at us with love, asks us for something, forgives us for something and gives us a mission”.

Before continuing the celebration — “now Jesus comes to the altar” he recalled — Pope Francis invited prayer: “Lord, you are here, among us. Fix your gaze upon me and tell me what I am to do; how must I lament my mistakes, my sins; what is the courage with which I must go forth on the path that you took first”. And “during this Eucharistic sacrifice” it is important “that we have this dialogue with Jesus”. Then, he concluded, “it will do us good to think throughout the day of Jesus’ gaze upon me”.