



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A twofold confession

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Only those who are humble and able to recognize their own condition as sinners can let themselves truly be encountered by the Lord. The characteristics of the personal encounter with Jesus were the focus of Pope Francis' reflection during Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning.

The Pontiff began his homily by turning to the day's Gospel reading. In this passage, taken from Luke (5:1-11), Peter is told to cast his nets after he spent a fruitless night of fishing. "It's the first time that this happens, this miraculous catch. But after the Resurrection there will be another, with similar characteristics", the Pope pointed out. Simon Peter falls down at Jesus' knees, saying "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord". From this gesture, Francis explained how "Jesus encounters the people and how the people encounter Jesus".

First of all, Jesus takes to the streets, "he spends most of his time on the streets, with the people; then late in the evening he goes alone to pray". Thus, he "encounters people", he seeks them. But, the Pope asked, how do the people encounter Jesus? Basically, he said, there are two different ways. One is what we see from Peter and the other is what the people do. The Pope indicated that the Gospel "uses the same word for these people: for the people, for the Apostles, and for Peter".

It says that upon encountering Jesus, they “were ‘astonished’”. Peter, the Apostles, and the people, show “this feeling of astonishment” and say: “This man speaks with authority”. On the contrary, however, the Gospels also speak of “another group who encounter Jesus” but who “do not let astonishment enter their heart”. They are the doctors of the Law, who hear Jesus and calculate: “He is intelligent, a man who says things that are true, but these things are not appropriate for us”.

Basically, “they distance themselves”. Then there are those “who listen to Jesus”, and there are “demons”, such as in the Gospel Reading on Wednesday, 2 September. There, we read that Jesus “laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God’”. The Pope explained that “the demons, the doctors of the Law, the wicked Pharisees do not have a capacity for astonishment, they are closed by their self-importance, by their arrogance”.

Instead, the people and Peter are capable of astonishment. “What is the difference?”, Francis asked. In fact, he said, Peter “confesses” what the demons confess. When, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks: “Who am I?”, and Peter answers, “You are the Son of God, you are the Messiah”. Peter “makes a confession, saying who He is”. And the demons also do the same, acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God. But Peter adds “another something that the demons do not say”. That is, he speaks about himself and says: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner”. The Pharisees, the doctors of the Law, the demons “are unable to say this”, they are incapable. “The demons”, Francis explained, “can speak the truth about him, but they say nothing about themselves”, because their “arrogance is so great that it prevents them from saying it”.

Even the doctors of the Law acknowledge that “this man is intelligent, he is a competent rabbi, he works miracles”. But they are unable to add: “We are arrogant, we are self-important, we are sinners”.

Here then is the lesson that applies to everyone: “The inability to acknowledge that we are sinners distances us from the true confession of Jesus Christ”. This, precisely, “is the difference”. Jesus illustrates it “in that beautiful parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the temple”, where we are met with “the Pharisee’s arrogance before the altar”. The man speaks highly of himself, but never says: “I am a sinner, I have made mistakes”. This is compared with “the humility of the tax collector, who would not even lift up his eyes”, and who says only: “Have mercy, Lord, I am a sinner”, opening himself “to astonishment at the encounter with Jesus Christ, the true encounter”.

At this point the Pope turned his attention to the present reality: “in our parishes, in our societies, among consecrated people too: how many people are able to say that Jesus is the Lord? Quite a lot!”. But it is difficult to hear a “sincerely stated ‘I am a sinful man, I am a sinful woman’”. It is probably, he said, “easier to say it about others, when gossiping” and pointing the finger: “This one, that one, this yes...”. In doing so, “we are all doctors”.

Instead, “to come to a true encounter with Jesus, a twofold confession is necessary: ‘You are the Son of God and I am a sinner’”. But not just in theory: we have to be honest with ourselves, be able to identify our mistakes and admit: “I am a sinner for this, for this, for this and for this...”.

Returning to the Gospel account, the Pontiff recalled that later Peter perhaps “forgets this astonishment at the encounter”, the astonishment that he had when Jesus said to him: “You are Simon, Son of John, but I will call you Peter”. And one day, the same Peter “who makes this twofold confession” will deny the Lord. However, being “humble”, he even lets himself “be encountered by the Lord, and when their eyes meet, he cries, returning to the confession: ‘I am a sinner’”.

In light of all this came Pope Francis’ concluding hope: “May the Lord give us the grace”, he said, “to encounter him but also to let ourselves be encountered by him”. The beautiful grace of “astonishment at the encounter”, but also “the grace of having the twofold confession in our life: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, I believe. And I am a sinner, I believe’”.