



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

In a shoreless sea

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Prayer, adoration, and acknowledging that we are sinners: these are the three paths which open a Christian to the knowledge and understanding of the mystery of God. Pope Francis reflected on this theme during his homily for Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, 20 October.

The Pontiff's reflection was inspired by the words of Saint Paul to the Philippians (3:8), taken from the day's Gospel acclamation: "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ". In the day's first reading (Eph 3:14-21), Paul asks that the Ephesians may likewise receive "the grace" to "gain Christ". It is about "a step in prayer", Francis explained. Indeed, Paul teaches the Ephesians "this path", and prays on his knees: 'I bow my knees before the Father... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man'".

What the Apostle is calling for is the "grace to be strong, strengthened, through the Holy Spirit". However, why would he wish "that the Ephesians be strengthened through the Holy Spirit?". Paul responds: it is so that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith". This "is the core", the Pope said. However, the Apostle "does not stop there, he continues: [it is so] 'that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints'". And this is the

understanding which the letter to the Ephesians gives to this original explanation: “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge”.

“Paul, in this prayer”, Francis said, “goes forward and immerses himself into this sea, this bottomless, shoreless sea, an immense sea which is the person of Christ”. Thus, “he prays that the Father may give to the Ephesians — he prays for us — this grace: to know Christ”.

Yet, how does one “know Christ” in such a way that He is the “true gain”, before whom “all other things are refuse”? Through the Gospel, the Pope said. Indeed, Christ “is present in the Gospel”: therefore, by “reading the Gospel we know Christ”. And “all of us do this, at least when we hear the Gospel when we go to Mass”. Of course, we can also know Jesus “through the study of the catechism: the catechism teaches us who Christ is”. All of this, however, “is not sufficient. In order to be able to understand ‘the breadth and length and height and depth’ of Jesus, we first must enter into a context of prayer, as Paul did, on bended knee: ‘Father, send me the Spirit to know Jesus Christ’”.

Thus, understanding goes beyond the superficial, and penetrates into the depths of the mystery. The Pope observed: “We know the Child Jesus, Jesus who heals the sick, Jesus who preaches, who performs miracles, who dies and resurrects. We know all of this, but this does not mean we know the mystery of Christ”. Indeed, it deals with “something very profound, and for this reason prayer is necessary: ‘Father, send me your Spirit in order that I might know Christ’. It is a grace. It is a grace which the Father gives”.

In addition to prayer, Francis spoke of the need for adoration. Paul, in fact, “not only prayed, he adored this mystery which surpasses all understanding, and in a context of adoration asks for the grace that ‘to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations’”. This is therefore “an act of adoration, of praise: to adore”. This is because “one cannot know the Lord without this habit of adoring, of adoring in silence”. The Pontiff observed that this practice is not always found in the Christian life. “I believe, if I am not mistaken”, he said, “that this prayer of adoration is the [prayer] least known by us, it is the one we do the least”, as if it were a “waste of time before the Lord, before the mystery of Jesus Christ”. Instead, we should rediscover “the silence of Adoration: he is the Lord and I adore him”.

In short, “in order to know Christ, it is necessary to have self-knowledge, which means having the inclination to blame yourself”, recognizing that, before God, “I am a sinner. But, no, I am a sinner by definition, since you know all the things I have done, and what I am capable of doing”. In this respect, Francis recalled the passage from Chapter 6 of Isaiah, in which the prophet, at the moment in which he sees “the Lord, and all the angels who adore the Lord”, exclaimed: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (v. 5): in other words, the Pope said, he admits to

being a sinner. Therefore, “one cannot adore without blaming oneself”.

In the end, “in order to enter into this bottomless, shoreless sea, which is the mystery of Jesus Christ”, these three attitudes are necessary, the Pope concluded. The first is “prayer: ‘Father, send me the Spirit so that he may lead me to know Jesus’. Second, adoration of the mystery, to enter into the mystery, to adore. And the third, to blame yourself: ‘I am a man of unclean lips”. From here there is the hope that “the Lord may give us this grace which Paul asks for the Ephesians, and also for us; the grace to know and gain Christ”.