



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Those invited to the banquet

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(by: www.osservatoreromano.va)

Celebrating mass at Santa Marta on 7 November, Pope Francis meditated on the image of the banquet from the Gospel of Luke [14:15-24] in which the master of the house invites “the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame” after the rejection of the wealthy men who do not understand the value of something given freely such as salvation. There is an “entrance ticket” to the Lord’s salvation, the Pontiff told the faithful; it is a free ticket, but one which will be appointed to the men and women who realise that they “need care and healing in body and soul”.

Referring to the banquet mentioned in the Gospel, Francis noted that “the Lord goes to the house of a leader of the Pharisees for a meal and there he is reproached for not observing the ablutions”. Then, the Pope continued, “during the banquet the Lord advises not to seek the place of honour because there is the danger that one more eminent could come and the master of the house say: ‘give up your place for this person, move!’. It would be embarrassing”.

“The passage continues with the advice that the Lord gives as to who should be invited to a banquet at home”, identifying the elect as “those who have nothing to give you in exchange”. Such is “the gratuity of the banquet” the Pontiff affirmed. Consequentially, after the Lord “had finished explaining this, one of the fellow diners said to Jesus: ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’” The Lord, “without explanation, responded to him with a parable of this man who held a great banquet and invited many”. However, “the first ones to be invited did not want to

go to the dinner; they did not care about the meal or the people who were there, or of the Lord who invited them; they were interested in other things”.

In fact, one after the other they began to make excuses, the Pope explained, thus “the first said to him, ‘I have bought a field’; the other, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen’; another, ‘I have married’”. They each had their own interests which were greater to them than the invitation”. The fact is, affirmed the Pontiff, that they “clung to interests” asking themselves, ‘what could I gain?’ For this reason, their response to the freely given invitation was “I do not care; perhaps another day, I am so busy, I cannot go”. They were busy “like the man who, after the harvest, after the gathering of the grain, made store houses in order to expand his goods” Francis explained, adding, “poor man, he died that night”.

These people are attached “to interests to the point in which” they fall into “slavery of the spirit”, and they are “incapable of understanding the gratuity of the invitation”. Indeed, the Pope warned that “if one does not understand the gratuity of God’s invitation, then one understands nothing”.

God’s invitation is “always free” he stressed, thus posing the question: “In order to go to this banquet what should one pay?”. In response, the Holy Father said, “the entrance ticket is to be sick, to be poor, to be a sinner”, that is, we must be “in need, both in body and in soul”, and by ‘neediness’ the Pontiff meant “need of care, healing, and love”.

“Here one sees two attitudes” he observed. The first, that of God, “is always free: in order to save, God does not charge anything”. The Pope then described God’s freely given love as “universal”, for “the gratuity of God has no limits, He receives everyone”. Indeed, in the scripture passage, “the master gets angry”, saying to his servant, “go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame”, and in Matthew’s version of the parable, the Pope noted, the master even says to bring the “good and bad”.

“However, those who mind their own interests do not understand the gratuity” he asserted, proceeding to explain that “they are like the son who remained by the father’s side when the younger son left; then, after much time he returned, poor, and the father holds a feast and this son does not want to enter into that banquet. He does not want to enter into that feast because he does not understand, [and says]: ‘He has spent all the money; he has spent the inheritance, on vice and sin, and you hold him a feast? And I, who am a practising Catholic, I go to mass every Sunday, I carry out my duties, and to me, nothing?’”

The fact is that “he does not understand the gratuity of salvation; he thinks that salvation is the fruit of ‘I pay and you save me’”. Rather, “salvation is free”, Francis continued, and “if you do not enter into such adynamic of gratuity you will not understand anything”.

Salvation, he affirmed, “is a gift from God to which I respond with another gift, the gift of my heart”.

There are those however, “who have other interests when they hear talk of gifts”, the Pontiff warned, and they say to themselves: “I will give this gift and tomorrow and the next day, or on another occasion, he will give me another”. As such there is “always an exchange” he added.

Rather, “the Lord does not ask for anything in exchange” continued the Pontiff, “only love and faithfulness, for He is love and He is faithful”. Indeed, “salvation is not bought” he insisted, “one simply enters the banquet: ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ This, the Pope asserted, “is salvation”.

The Pope concluded with a reflection: “I ask myself, what do they feel, the ones who are indisposed to come to this banquet? They feel safe, they feel secure, they feel saved in their own way, outside of the banquet”, for “they have lost the meaning of gratuity; they have lost the meaning of love and they have lost a greater and more beautiful thing” he added, namely, “the capacity to feel themselves loved”, which, he clarified, leaves “no hope”; when you no longer feel loved, “you have lost everything”. Thus, Francis suggested that the faithful turn their gaze towards the master of the house who wants his house filled: “he is so full of love that in his gratuity he wants to fill his home”, and therefore, “we implore the Lord to save us from losing the capacity to feel loved”.