



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

An open door

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“Asking forgiveness is not simply making an apology”. It isn’t easy, just as “it isn’t easy to receive God’s forgiveness: not because He doesn’t want to give it to us, but because we close the door by not forgiving” others. In his homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, Pope Francis added an essential element to his reflection on the path of repentance that characterizes Lent: the theme of forgiveness.

His reflection began from the passage of the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel (3:25, 34-43), which tells of the Prophet Azariah, who “is being tested and recalls the trial of his people, who are slaves”. But, the Pontiff pointed out, the people “weren’t slaves by chance: they were enslaved because they abandoned the Law of the Lord, because they sinned”. Therefore, Azariah prays: “For your name’s sake, O Lord, do not deliver us up forever! Do not take away your mercy from us! For we are reduced, we have sinned. We are brought low this day. This day we ask mercy”. In other words, Azariah “repents. He asks forgiveness for the sins of his people”. Thus, the prophet, put to the test, “does not lament before God”. He doesn’t say: “You are unjust with us, look at what has happened to us now...”. Instead, he affirms: “We have sinned and we deserve this”. This is the crucial detail: Azariah “has the sense of sin”.

The Pope then pointed out that Azariah does not say to the Lord: “Sorry, we made a mistake”. In fact, “asking forgiveness is something else”, it’s not the same as making an apology. These are two different things: the first is simply asking to be excused, the second involves the acknowledgement of having sinned. Indeed, sin “is not simply a mistake. Sin is idolatry”, it is worshipping the “many idols that we have: pride, vanity, money, the self, wellbeing. This is why Azariah doesn’t simply apologize, but “begs forgiveness”.

The day’s passage from the Gospel according to Matthew (18:21-35) then led Francis to address the other side of forgiveness: from the forgiveness sought from God to the forgiveness given to our brothers. Peter asks Jesus the question: “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?”. In the Gospel, the Pope explained, “there aren’t many times in which a person asks forgiveness”. He then recalled a few events, such as “the sinner who cries at Jesus’ feet, bathes his feet in her tears and dries them with her hair”. In that case, the Pontiff said, “that woman had sinned much, loved much, and asked forgiveness”. Then he recalled the episode in which Peter, “after the miraculous catch of fish, says to Jesus: ‘Stay away from me, for I am a sinner’”. There, however, Peter “realizes that he hadn’t made a mistake, that there was something else inside him”. And again, we can consider “when Peter cries, the night of Holy Thursday, when Jesus looks at him”.

In any case, there are “few moments in which forgiveness is sought”. But in the passage from the day’s liturgy, Peter asks the Lord how great the measure of our forgiveness must be: “Only seven times?”. Jesus answers the Apostle “with word play meaning ‘always’: seventy times seven, that is, you must always forgive”.

Here, Francis emphasized, this speaks of “forgiveness”, not simply to apologize for a mistake, but to forgive “one who has offended me, who has harmed me, one who through his/her cruelty, has injured my life, my heart”.

And thus the question for each of us today is: “What is the measure of my forgiveness?”. The answer can be found in the parable Jesus tells of the man “who was forgiven” an incredible monetary debt of “many, many millions”, and who then, quite happy about being forgiven, goes out and “finds a companion who owes him perhaps a debt of 5 euros and sends him to jail”. The example is obvious: “If I cannot forgive, I cannot ask forgiveness”. This is why “Jesus teaches us to pray like this to the Father: ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’”.

What does this really mean? Pope Francis answered by inventing a dialogue: “Father, I confess, I am going to confess.... — And what do you do, before confessing? — I think about the things I have done wrong — Okay — Then I ask the Lord’s forgiveness and I promise not to do it any more.... — Good. And then you go to the priest?”. But first “you are missing something: have you forgiven those who have harmed you?”. Since the prayer we were taught is “Forgive us our

trespasses as we forgive others”, we know that “the forgiveness that God will give you” requires “the forgiveness that you give to others”.

In conclusion, Francis summarized his meditation: first, “Asking forgiveness is not simply making an apology”, but “is being aware of the sin, of the idolatry that I have done, of the many idolatries”; second, “God always forgives, always”, but He also requires that I forgive, because “if I don’t forgive”, it is in a sense as if I were closing “God’s door”. This is a door that we need to keep open: let us allow God’s forgiveness to come in so that we may forgive others.