



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The sister's nickname

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 44, 30 October 2015)

We do not have “a petty God”, nor “a stationary God”. Ours is “a God who goes forth” to “seek out each one of us”. And when he finds us, “he embraces us, kisses us”, because he is “a God who celebrates” and in heaven there is more celebration “for a sinner who converts” than “for 100 who remain just”. At Tuesday’s Mass at Santa Marta, the Pontiff returned to the theme of the “boundless love” of the Father.

In his usual manner, Francis began from the day’s Readings, in particular the passage of the Letter to the Romans (5:12, 15, 17-19, 20-21), in which St Paul recalls that “as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned... much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many”. This, the Pope pointed out, is “a summary of salvation history”, in which the Apostle “tells us how God saved us, how he saves us: how he gives salvation, which is the friendship between us and him”.

The Pontiff connected this passage to that of the previous day’s Liturgy, in which, he recalled, “we spoke about almsgiving, we said that God gives without measure: he gives himself, his Son”. The discussion once again revolved around “this idea: how does God give, in this case friendship, our

entire salvation?”. The Pontiff’s answer was that God “gives as he says he will give to us when we do good works: he will give us a good and firmly packed, filled to the brim, overflowing amount”. This generosity calls to mind the concept of “abundance”. By no coincidence, Francis observed, “this word, ‘abundance’, is repeated three times in this passage”.

Thus, “God gives in abundance”. Indeed, Paul, in the “final summary” of his discourse, affirms: “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”. This is how God’s love is: “without measure. His wholeself”. In fact, the Pope recalled, he “sent his Son, he lowered himself to become a companion on the path, to walk with us: he himself walked with us, from the beginning, with his people”.

What then is the meaning of “this overabundance of self giving that is God’s love?”. It means that “God is not a petty God: he does not know pettiness, he gives all”. It also means that “God is not a stationary God: he watches, he waits for us to convert”. Basically, the Pontiff said, God is a God who goes forth: he goes forth to search, to seek out each of us”. Every day “he searches, he is searching”, like the shepherd does with the “lost sheep” or the woman with the “lost coin”. God “seeks: it is always so. God actively waits. He never tires of awaiting us”. His attitude is that of the “elderly father” who “saw his son coming, returning from afar” and immediately went to meet him and “embrace him”. God too, “awaits us: always, with the door open”. Because his heart “isn’t closed: it’s always open”. And “when we arrive like the son, he embraces us, kisses us: a God who celebrates”. Jesus “says it explicitly, speaking about justification, about forgiven sins: there will be a greater feast in heaven for a sinner who converts than for 100 who remain just”. This “is the love of God; God loves us this way, without measure”.

Of course, Francis recognized that “it isn’t easy, with our human criteria — we are small, limited — to understand God’s love. We can understand in these gestures of the Lord, this overabundance, but understanding everything isn’t easy”.

To illustrate, the Pope referred to a nun he met during his ministry in Buenos Aires. She was “an elderly sister, very elderly, who worked her entire life on a hospital ward, and was still working there”. She was “over 84 years old” but was “always smiling. She surely experienced God’s love, because she always spoke about the love of God and let this love be felt”. For this reason, “they gave her a nickname”. She was called “Sr Love-of-God”. It is “a grace”, the Pontiff said, “to find such people, these saints, to whom the Lord has given the gift of understanding this mystery, this overabundance of his love”.

The fact remains that “we always have the attitude of gauging situations and things with the measures we have: and our measures are small”. This is why, Francis recommended, “it will do us good to ask the Holy Spirit for the grace, to pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to bring us at least a bit closer to understand this love and to have the will to be embraced, kissed, with that boundless measure”. St Paul, in reality, “understood how bad sin is” but also “how great is the

overabundance of God's love. To the point that he feels small and at one moment, moved by the Holy Spirit, he calls God 'papa'. He often "speaks of the Father" as "the Father" but, "at one moment he says: 'papa'. Thus, the Pope emphasized, "thanks to the Holy Spirit I can call him 'papa". In conclusion he said: "Let us ask for the grace of feeling this love, that is the love of a papa, a great and boundless love".