



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ**

Going out to give life

Tuesday, 9 December 2014

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The Pontiff began his homily Tuesday morning with the day's First Reading from the Book of Isaiah (40:1-11), in which the Prophet proclaims God's comfort to Israel. This prophetic promise passes through all history to reach us today. But when is it fulfilled in the Church?

Pope Francis recalled that, as "a person is comforted when he feels the Lord's mercy and forgiveness, the Church celebrates; she is happy to go out of herself". The joy of the Church is to "give birth", and to "come out of herself in order to give life". In other words, the joy of the Church is to "go out in search of those sheep who are lost", and to witness to "that very tenderness of the shepherd, the tenderness of the mother".

In recalling the words from the Gospel of Matthew (18:12-14), the Pope highlighted the impetus that drives the shepherd "who goes out", who "goes to look for" the lost and missing sheep. Yet, this zealous shepherd "can keep count like a prudent businessman". He loses one of 99, but his balance sheet still shows plenty of assets. However, Francis indicated, he "has the heart of a shepherd, he goes out to search" and, when he finds that one, "he celebrates, he is joyful".

"The joy of going out in search of faraway brothers and sisters" is born in the same manner. "This is the joy of the Church". It is precisely in this way that the Church "becomes mother, becomes

fruitful". On the contrary, the Pontiff admonished, when the Church doesn't do this, "she stands still inside, she is closed within herself", even though "she might be well organized". And in this manner she becomes "a discouraged, anxious, sad Church; a Church who is more spinster than mother; and this Church isn't useful", such a Church is no more than a museum.

The end of the passage from Isaiah returns to the image of a shepherd who "will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young". This is "the joy of the Church: going out of herself and becoming fruitful", as in the time of Israel, when Isaiah proclaimed to the people those words of comfort offered by the Lord. Thus, in rereading this passage the Church opens herself to joy. She receives strength. Because the people are in "need of comfort". The same presence of the Lord "comforts, always comforts, either firmly or mildly, but it always comforts". Indeed, the Pope stated, wherever the Lord is, "there is comfort and peace". Even in tribulations, he added, "peace is there", the peace "that is the presence of the Lord who comforts".

Unfortunately, men tend to run away from consolation. "We have mistrust, we are more comfortable in our things, and also more comfortable in our shortcomings, in our sins". It is here that man feels more at ease rather than "when the Spirit comes and comfort comes". This leads us to a condition beyond our control: the state of "abandonment in the Lord's comfort". It is in this situation that peace and joy arrive, as recalled in this beautiful expression of Hezekiah: "'unto peace he hath changed my bitterness', for the Lord went there in order to comfort". It is also recited in the "Psalm of the prisoners in Jerusalem, in Babylon: 'When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream' — they didn't believe it! — 'our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy'".

Indeed, when "the comfort of the Lord" arrives, "it disturbs us. It's He, not we, who commands. And the strongest comfort is that of mercy and of forgiveness", as Isaiah proclaims: "cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins". From this point came the Pope's call for reflection on how God's generosity cannot be transcended. "You have sinned 100 times, partake 200 times of joy: this is how God's mercy is when He comes to comfort", Francis explained.

Nevertheless, man tries to back away, because "this gives us some fear, a bit of mistrust: 'It's too much, Lord!'". In order to render understandable the infinite quality of God's mercy, the Pontiff returned to the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, in Chapter 16, following "the list of so many sins of the people, so very many, he says at the end: 'But I will not abandon you; I will give you more, this will be my punishment: consolation and forgiveness'". He is truly like this, "our God, the God who comforts in mercy and in forgiveness". This is why it's good to repeat: "Let yourselves be comforted by the Lord, He alone can comfort us".

Francis added that we so often "'hire out' small consolations", but these consolations "are useless,

they may help but they aren't useful". In fact, what's useful to us is only what "comes from the Lord, with his forgiveness and our humility. When the heart humbles itself, that comfort comes" and we can be carried forth "by this joy, this peace".

The Pontiff concluded with an invocation to the Lord, that "He grant us the grace to work, to be Christians" who are "joyful in the fruitfulness of Mother Church", and that He save us from the danger of "falling into the attitude of these sad, impatient, mistrustful, anxious Christians" who, in the Church, have all that is perfect, yet bear no fruit. The Pope asked God to console us with "the comfort of a Mother Church who goes out of herself" and with "the comfort of Jesus' tenderness his mercy in the forgiveness of our sins".