



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Like burning incense

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Knowing we were personally chosen even before the creation of the world, every man must rediscover the importance of the free and joyous prayer of praise to God. At Thursday morning's Mass at Santa Marta, Pope Francis chose to reflect on the day's First Reading, recalling St Paul's well-known hymn in the Letter to the Ephesians (1:1-10). In this veritable explosion of praise, "it seems that Paul", Francis noted, is overcome with "joy, great joy".

It is an "unrestrained" hymn in which the Apostle uses the word "bless" three times: 'Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places'. But, the Pontiff pointed out, "we all know that God is the Blessed One": in the Old Testament, in fact, "it was one of the names that the people of Israel gave Him: the Blessed One". It is curious to think of "blessing God" because "He is the Blessed One".

In truth, it is an important gesture, because "when I bless God, I praise Him", and this praise rises "like burning incense". Prayers of praise aren't done habitually, yet, Francis highlighted, it was Jesus himself who taught us, "in the *Our Father*, to pray this way: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...". It shouldn't seem unusual to turn with these words to He who "is the Holy One". It is about expressing the "joy of the prayer of praise", which is "purely free", the Bishop

of Rome explained. In fact, generally, “we know how to pray extremely well when we ask for things” and also “when we thank the Lord”; it is less customary for all of us “to praise the Lord”.

We might feel a stronger incentive toward this type of prayer, the Pope advised, if “we remember the things that the Lord has done in our life”, as did St Paul, who recalled in his hymn: “He chose us in him” — in Christ — “before the foundation of the world”. Here is the source of our prayer: “Blessed are you, Lord, because you have chosen me!”. Man must, so to speak, feel the “joy of paternal and gentle closeness”.

The same thing happened to the people of Israel when they were freed from Babylon, the Pontiff recalled, citing several verses of Psalm 126[125]: “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream’ — We couldn’t believe it! — ‘Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy”. And the Pope observed: “Let’s think of a broad smile: this is a prayer of praise”, it is the immediate expression of immense joy”, of “being joyful before the Lord”. It is the disposition of the heart not to forget: “Let’s make an effort to find it again” he urged, calling on us to use the very words of Psalm 98[97]: “Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn, make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!”.

It is very important to remember how much the Lord has done for each one of us, “how He accompanied me with tenderness, how He lowered Himself, He bent down” in the same way as a father who “bends down to help his child walk”. And, the Pope underscored, He has done so “with each one of us”.

“All is celebration, all is joy” if each one — as St Paul himself attests to the Ephesians — can say: “the Lord chose me before the foundation of the world”. This is “the starting point”. Even if, Francis emphasized, “one can’t understand” and “one can’t imagine: that the Lord knew me before the creation of the world, that my name was in the Lord’s heart”. But “this is truth, this is revelation”. And, the Pontiff added, “if we don’t believe this, then we aren’t Christians”. Perhaps, he explained, “we could be permeated by a theistic religiosity”, but we wouldn’t be Christians, because precisely this being “chosen” is characteristic of Christians.

The thought of having always lived in the heart of God “fills us with joy” and “gives us security”. This security is confirmed by the Lord’s words to the Prophet Isaiah, who asked himself whether this affection could ever fail: “Can a mother forget her children? And even should a mother forget them I will not forget you”. God holds each of us in his “bosom”, the way “a baby is inside his mother”.

This truth, Francis pointed out, is so great and beautiful that it can be tempting not to think about it, to avoid it as it looms over us. In fact, “it cannot be understood with the mind”, and “not even with the heart”. To make it our own and to experience it, he explained, “we must enter into the mystery

of Jesus Christ”, of He who “so freely shed his blood for us”, and who “has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will”.

Hence the third fundamental approach of the Christian, after those of the prayer of praise and of knowing how to remember. The Christian is called “to enter into the mystery” above all when “we celebrate the Eucharist”, as we are unable to fully comprehend “that the Lord is alive, He is with us, here, in his glory, his fullness, and He gives his life for us once again”.

It is an approach, the Pontiff concluded, that we must make an effort to “learn every day” because “the mystery can’t be controlled: it’s a mystery! We must enter it”.