



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

When God forgets

Friday, 23 January 2015

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Confession is not a judgement nor is it like going to the dry cleaners who remove the stain of sins. It is the encounter with a Father who always forgives, forgives all, forgets the faults of the past and then even celebrates. And it is the embrace of God's reconciliation that the Pope spoke about on Friday morning, during Mass at Santa Marta, where representatives of Rome's Filipino community were present. They gathered closely around him to relive the joy of the recent pastoral journey.

"God reconciled the world to himself in Christ and entrusted to us the message of reconciliation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:19). Francis chose this point of departure for his meditation. "It is beautiful, this work of God: to reconcile", the Pope remarked, pointing out the task that God entrusts to us: "to make reconciliation, to always reconcile".

There is no doubt, he said, that "a Christian is a man or woman of reconciliation, not of division". After all, "the father of division is the devil". God himself gives "this example of reconciling the world, the people". He was referring to what we heard in the First Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (8:6-13), particularly to "that most beautiful promise: 'I will establish a new covenant'".

A question so decisive, said the Bishop of Rome, that "covenant is mentioned five times in this

passage". Indeed "it is God who reconciles, creating a new relationship with us, a new covenant". And "to do this He sends Jesus; the God who reconciles is the God who forgives".

The passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, Francis continued, "ends with that beautiful promise: "and I remember their sins no more". He is "the God who forgives: our God forgives, reconciles, establishes the new covenant and forgives". But "how does God forgive? First of all, God always forgives! He never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking forgiveness. But He never tires of forgiving". Indeed, "when Peter asks Jesus: how often shall I forgive, seven times?", he received an eloquent reply: "not seven times, but seventy times seven" (cf. Mt 18:21-22). In other words, "always", because "this is how God forgives: always". Therefore, "if you have lived a life of many sins, many bad things, but at the end, contritely ask for forgiveness, He forgives you straight away. He always forgives".

However, Pope Francis recognized, "we do not have this certainty in our heart and many times we are doubtful", wondering whether God will forgive. In reality, he recalled, "we need only repent and ask for forgiveness: nothing more! It costs us nothing! Christ paid for us and He always forgives".

Another important thing the Pontiff wanted to reinforce is that not only does God "always forgive", but He also forgives "all: there is no sin that He would not forgive". Perhaps, the Pope explained, someone could say: "I don't go to confession because I have done so many bad things, so many of those things for which I will not be forgiven...". However "it isn't true", Francis emphasized, because "if you go contritely", then God "forgives all". And "many times He doesn't let you speak: you start asking for forgiveness and He makes you feel that joy of forgiveness before you have finished saying everything". It is just "as it happened with that son who, after squandering all the money of his inheritance with an immoral life", and then "he repented" and prepared a speech to present to his father. However, "when he arrived the father didn't let him speak, he embraced him: because he forgives all. He embraced him".

And then, "there is another thing God does when He forgives: He celebrates". And this, the Pontiff indicated, "is not imagined, Jesus says it: 'There will be a feast in heaven when a sinner goes to the Father'". Truly, "God celebrates". Thus, "when we feel our heart heavy with sins, we can say: let's go to the Lord to give Him joy, so that He may forgive us and celebrate". God works in this way: "He always celebrates because He reconciles".

Continuing his meditation on the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope proposed the final words again. They suggest, he explained, "something beautiful about the way God forgives: God forgets". Scripture also puts it in other words: "Your sins shall be cast into the sea, and though they are red like blood, they shall become white as a lamb" (cf. Mic 7:19; Is 1:18).

Hence, God forgets, and "if one of us goes to the Lord" and says: "Do you remember, in that year I did something bad?", He answers: "No, no, no. I don't remember". Because "once He forgives He

no longer remembers, He forgets”, while “so often, with others, we ‘keep a record’: this one did this, another one once did that...”. But God doesn’t do this: “He forgives and forgets”. However, Francis asked himself, “if He forgets, who am I to remember the sins of others?”. Thus, the Father “forgets, always forgives, forgives all, celebrates when He forgives, and He forgets, because He wants to reconcile, He wants to encounter us”.

In the light of this reflection the Pope recalled that “when one of us — a priest, a bishop — goes to confess, he must always think: am I ready to forgive all? Am I always ready to forgive all? Am I ready to rejoice and celebrate? Am I ready to forget that person’s sins?”. Because, “if you aren’t ready, it’s better that you don’t enter the confessional that day: that someone else go, because you don’t have the heart of God to forgive”. Indeed, “in confession, it’s true, there’s a judgement, because the priest judges”, saying: “you’ve done harm here, you did...”. However, the Pope explained, “it is more than a judgement: it’s an encounter, an encounter with the good God who always forgives, who forgives all, who knows how to celebrate when He forgives, and who forgets your sins when He forgives you”. And “we priests need to have this attitude”, of encounter. Otherwise, “so often confessions seem to be a practice, a formality”, where everything appears “mechanical”. But like this, the Pontiff asked, where is “the encounter with the Lord who reconciles, embraces you and celebrates? This is our God”, who is “so good”.

The Pontiff pointed out the importance of teaching children how to make a good confession, reminding them that “going to confession isn’t like going to the dry cleaner to have a stain removed”: confession “is going to encounter the Father who reconciles, who forgives and who celebrates”.

In conclusion Francis recommended that we “think of this covenant that the Lord makes each time that we ask for forgiveness”. And also to think “of our Father who always reconciles: God who reconciled the world to himself in Christ and entrusted to us the message of reconciliation”, in the hope that “the Lord may give us grace of being content today to have a Father who always forgives, who forgives all, who celebrates when He forgives and who forgets our history of sin!”.