



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Two identity cards

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To know our true identity we cannot be “seated Christians” but must have the “courage to always take up the journey to seek the Lord’s face”, because we are the “image of God”. In the Mass celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning expounding on the day’s First Reading — the creation narrative from the Book of Genesis (1:20 - 2:4) — Pope Francis reflected on a question essential for every person: “Who am I?”.

Our “identity card”, the Pope said, is found in the fact that mankind was created “in the image, in the likeness of God”. But then, he added, “the question we could ask ourselves is: How can I know the image of God? How can I know what He is like in order to know what I’m like? Where can I find the image of God?”. The answer obviously cannot be found “on a computer, nor in an encyclopedia, nor in books”, because “God’s image is not in any catalogue”. There is only one way “to find the image of God, which is my identity” and that is to journey: “If we don’t take up the journey, we will never get to know the face of God”.

This desire for knowledge is also found in the Old Testament. The Psalmists, Francis pointed out, “say many times: I want to see your face”; and “even Moses says this once to the Lord”. But in

reality “it isn’t easy, because taking up the journey means letting go of many securities, many opinions about what God’s image is like, and to seek it”. It means, in other words, “to let God and life put us to the test. It means taking a risk, for “only in this way can we manage to know the face of God, the image of God: to take up the journey”.

The Pope drew again on the Old Testament to recall that “the People of God did this, the Prophets did this”. For instance, “the great Elijah: after he wins and purifies the faith of Israel, he hears the queen’s threat and is afraid and doesn’t know what to do. He takes up the journey. And at a certain point, he would rather die”. But God “calls him, gives him food and drink and says: keep going”. This is how Elijah “comes to the mount and there he finds God”. His was thus “a long journey, an arduous journey, a difficult journey”, but it teaches us that “those who don’t take up the journey will never know the image of God, will never find the face of God”. It’s a lesson for all of us: “seated Christians, calm Christians” — the Pope stated — “will not know the face of God”. They have the presumption to say: “God is like this, and like this...”. But in reality “they do not know Him”.

To journey, instead, we need to have “that restlessness, which God placed in our heart and which carries us onward to seek him”. The same thing happened, the Pontiff explained, “to Job who, with his trials, began to think: what kind of God would let this happen to me?”. His friends too, “after days of great silence, began to talk, to argue with him”. But none of this was helpful: “with these arguments, Job did not know God”. Instead, “when he allowed himself to be questioned by the Lord in the trial, he meets God”. And from Job we are also able to hear “that word that will help us so much on this journey to find our identity: ‘I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee’”. And this, according to Pope Francis, is the heart of the matter: “the encounter with God” which can happen “only by taking up the journey”.

Of course, he continued, “Job took up the journey cursing”. He actually “had the courage to curse life and his history: ‘Let the day perish wherein I was born...’”. In essence, the Pope reflected, “sometimes, on the journey of life, we don’t find the meaning of things”. The Prophet Jeremiah had the same experience. “After being seduced by the Lord, he felt that curse: ‘Why me?’”. He wanted to “remain calmly seated” but instead “the Lord wanted to show him His face”.

This applies to each of us: “to know our identity, to know the image of God, we must take up the journey”; we must be “restless, not calm”. This is precisely what it means “to seek the face of God”.

Pope Francis then referred to the passage from Mark’s Gospel (7:1-13), in which “Jesus meets people who are afraid to take up the journey” and who create a sort of “caricature of God”. But that “is a false identity card” because, the Pontiff explained, “these non-restless ones have calmed the restlessness of their heart: by illustrating God with commandments”. But in doing so “they have forgotten God” and see only “the tradition of men”. And, “when they have uncertainty, they invent

or make up another commandment". Jesus says to the scribes and Pharisees who accumulate commandments: "you are 'thus making void the Word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do'". This "is the false identity card, which we might have without taking up the journey," remaining "calm, without restlessness of heart".

In this regard the Pope highlighted a particular "curiosity": in fact the Lord "praises them but reprimands them where it hurts the most. He praises them: 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition'". But then "He reprimands them there, at the most powerful point of the commandments with one's neighbour". In fact, Jesus recalls that Moses said: "Honor your father and your mother; and He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die". He continues: "but you say instead that if a man tells his father or his mother, that what I would give to help you, namely to feed you, to clothe you, to buy you medicine, 'is Corban (that is, given to God) — then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother'". In doing so "they wash their hands according to the mildest commandment, the strongest one, the only one with a promise of blessing". And so, "they are at peace, they are calm, they do not take up the journey". This then, "is the image of God that they have". In reality their journey is "in quotation marks": in other words "a journey which doesn't move, a still journey. They deny their parents, but fulfil the laws of the tradition they have made".

Concluding his reflection, the Bishop of Rome again compared the two Readings to "two identity cards". The first is "the one we all have, because the Lord made us like this"; it is "the one that tells us: take up the journey and you will know your identity, for you are the image of God, you were created in the likeness of God. Take up the journey and look for God". The other, however, reassures us: "No, relax: fulfil all these commandments and this is God. This is the face of God". The Pope then asked the Lord to "give everyone the grace of courage to always take up the journey, to seek the Lord's face, that face which we will see one day, but which we must look for here on Earth".