



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The importance of saying goodbye

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Pope Francis recalled the suffering of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, rejected and abandoned in the middle of the sea, and also of the Christian and Yazidi refugees “cast out of their homes” in Iraq. These tragedies are taking place today right before our very eyes. Celebrating Mass on Tuesday morning in the chapel at Casa Santa Marta, the Pontiff proposed a reflection on the ultimate meaning of every farewell, great or small, with the word “goodbye” (a contraction of ‘God be with ye’), which expresses an act of entrustment to the Father. He also took the opportunity to speak of the sorrow and apprehension of all mothers who watch their sons depart for war.

After all, the Pope began, “the atmosphere in these final days of the Easter season is an atmosphere of farewell”. And “in the liturgy the Church takes up Jesus’ discourse at the Last Supper, where he bids farewell before his Passion, and makes us read it again: Jesus bids farewell in order to go to the Father and send us the Holy Spirit” (Jn 17:1-11).

Today, Francis repeated, “this atmosphere of farewell is also the focus of the First Reading, one of those beautiful pages of the Acts of the Apostles: Paul’s farewell” (20:17-27). He “was in Miletus” and “he sent the elders of the Church to call Ephesus” for “a gathering of the small churches, as big as parishes”. And thus “begins that discourse which will finish in tomorrow’s liturgy, where Paul

recalls his work, what he has done: 'I did not shrink declaring to you anything that was profitable, and from preaching to you and teaching you'. Therefore, "he reminds them that he has toiled, but he does not boast". It is a reminder: "This has been my life among you". He then adds: "And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit".

Paul's farewell, the Pope explained, was "even somewhat dramatic". In fact, Paul leaves "not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord". And that is, namely, "to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God".

Paul then "makes a rather long, brotherly speech, and when it's over he begins to weep". And he says: "now, behold, I know that you will see my face no more, but I know also that neither will I see yours". Then, "everyone weeping, they go to the beach, kneel down and pray, as they weep and bid farewell to Paul", accompanying him "to the ship".

Thus, the Pope summarized, referring to the two Readings, "Jesus bids farewell, Paul bids farewell and this helps us to reflect on our own farewells". Indeed "in our life there are many farewells: there are small farewells — you know I'm returning, today or tomorrow — and there are grand farewells and you don't know how this journey will end".

Francis recognized that it is "good to think about this", because "life is filled with farewells" and "there is also so much sorrow, so many tears" in some situations. And he called for reflection on the "poor Rohingya people in Myanmar. At the time they left their land to flee from persecution they didn't know what would happen to them. For months they have been on a boat, there.... They arrive in one city where, after being given food and water, they are told: 'Go away': it is a farewell".

The Pope then recalled "the farewell of the Christian and Yazidi who expect never to return again to their land because they are cast from their homes. Today!"

The Pontiff then pointed out that "there are even small, but great farewells in life: I think about the farewell of a mother who says goodbye, gives a final embrace to a son who goes off to war, and every day she awakes with the fear that an official will come and announce to her: 'We thank you very much for the generosity of your son who gave his life for the homeland'". Because "one never knows how these grand farewells will turn out". And then "there is also the final farewell, that we all must do, when the Lord calls us to the other side: I think about this".

"These great farewells of life, even the last one, are not farewells" that conclude with "see you soon, see you later, until we meet again". They are not farewells "in which one knows he is returning either right away or in a week". Instead, with grand farewells, "one neither knows when nor how" the return may be. And "that last farewell is even portrayed in art, in songs, for example".

In this regard, Francis spoke of the traditional song of the Alpine troops, recalling *Il Testamento del Capitano* [the Captain's Testament], "when that captain bids farewell to his soldiers". He then posed the question: "Do I think about that great farewell, my grand farewell", meaning: "not when I have to say 'see you soon', 'see you later', 'until we meet again', but 'goodbye'?"

The two texts in the day's liturgy "say the word 'goodbye'": Paul entrusts his own to God, and Jesus entrusts to the Father his disciples, who remain in the world. It is "entrusting to the Father, entrusting to God" which is the "origin of the word 'goodbye'". In fact, "we say 'goodbye' only in the great farewells, whether those of life, or the final one".

Before the icon "of Paul who weeps, kneeling on the beach" and the icon of "Jesus, somber for he is going to his Passion, with his disciples, weeping in his heart", the Pontiff recommended that we "reflect on it: it will do us good". And that we ask ourselves: "Who will be the person to close my eyes? What will I leave?". The Pope noted, in fact, that "Paul and Jesus, in these passages, both do an examination of conscience: 'I have done this, this and this'". And thus it is good to ask oneself, in a sort of examination of conscience: "What have I done?". And to do so with the awareness that "it is good for me to imagine myself at that moment, one never knows when, in which 'see you later', 'see you soon', 'see you tomorrow', 'until we meet again' will become 'goodbye'". He then invited further reflection: "Am I prepared to entrust to God all of my loved ones? To entrust myself to God? To say that word which is the Son's word of entrustment to the Father?".

Pope Francis also counseled: "if you have a little time today and, if you don't, find it!": read Chapter 16 of the Gospel according to John or Chapter 19 of the Acts of the Apostles. These are "the farewell of Jesus and the farewell of Paul". In the light of these very texts, it is important "to consider that one day I too will have to say that word: 'goodbye'". Yes, he added, "to God I entrust my soul; to God I entrust my history; to God I entrust my loved ones; to God I entrust all".

"Now", the Pope concluded, "let us remember Jesus' goodbye, Jesus' death". And he prayed "that Jesus, died and risen, will send us the Holy Spirit so that we learn this word, learn to say it existentially, with all our strength: the last word: 'goodbye'".