



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

For a culture of encounter

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An invitation to work for “the culture of encounter”, in a simple way, “as Jesus did”: not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying “what a shame, poor people!”, but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; “and then to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘Do not weep’ and to give at least a drop of life”. Pope Francis used these words in his homily to describe the message contained in the liturgical readings of the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning.

Focusing in particular on the scene of the widow of Nain, from the Gospel of Luke (7:11-17), the Pope highlighted that this passage from “the Word of God” speaks of “an encounter. There is an encounter between people, an encounter between people who were in the street”. And this, he commented, is “something unusual”. In fact, “when we go into the street, every man thinks of himself: he sees, but does not look; he hears, but does not listen”; in short, everyone goes their own way. And consequently “people pass each other, but they do not encounter each other”. Because, Pope Francis clarified, “an encounter is something else” entirely, and this is “what the Gospel today proclaims to us: an encounter between a man and a woman, between an only son who is alive and an only son who is dead; between a happy group of people — happy because they have encountered Jesus and followed him — and a group of people who weep as they

accompany the woman”, who is a widow and is on her way to bury her only son.

“The Gospel says: ‘When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her’”. In this regard, the Pope pointed out that it is not “the first time” the Gospel speaks of Christ’s compassion. “When Jesus saw the crowds, on the day of the multiplication of the loaves”, he was also seized with great compassion, the Pope said, “and before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, he wept”.

This compassion, the Pope advised, is not the same as what we normally feel “when, for example, we go out into the street and see something sad: ‘What a shame!’”. After all, “Jesus did not say: ‘What a poor woman!’”. On the contrary, “he went further. He was seized with compassion. ‘And he drew near and spoke. He said to her: Do not weep’”. In this way, “Jesus, with his compassion, involves himself with that woman’s problem. ‘He drew near, he spoke and he touched’. The Gospel says that he touched the coffin. Surely, however, when he said ‘do not weep’, he touched the widow as well. A caress. Because Jesus was moved. And then he performed the miracle”: that is, He raised the young man to life.

Thus the Pope pointed out an analogy: “The only son who is dead resembles Jesus, and he is transformed into an only son who is alive, like Jesus. And Jesus’ action truly shows the tenderness of an encounter, and not only the tenderness, but the fruitfulness of an encounter. ‘The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus returned him to his mother’. He did not say: ‘The miracle has been done’. No, he said: ‘Come, take him, he is yours’”. That is why “every encounter is fruitful. Each encounter returns people and things to their place”.

This discourse also reaches out to the people of today, who are far too “accustomed to a culture of indifference” and who therefore need to “work and ask for the grace to build a culture of encounter, of this fruitful encounter, this encounter that returns to each person their dignity as children of God, the dignity of living”. We “are accustomed to this indifference”, the Pope said, whether it be “when we see the calamities of this world” or when faced with the “little things”. We limit ourselves to saying: “Oh, what a shame, poor people, they suffer so much”, and then we move on. Pope Francis explained that an encounter, however, is different: “If I do not look, — seeing is not enough, no: look — if I do not stop, if I do not look, if I do not touch, if I do not speak, I cannot create an encounter and I cannot help to create a culture of encounter”.

Returning to the Gospel scene, the Pope highlighted that at seeing the miracle that Jesus performed, “the people were seized by fear and they glorified God. And I like to see here too”, the Pope explained, “the day-to-day encounter between Jesus and his bride, the Church, who awaits his return. And every time that Jesus finds pain, a sinner, a person in the street, He looks at them, He speaks to them, He returns them to his bride”. Therefore, “this is today’s message: Jesus’ encounter with his people; the encounter of Jesus who serves, who helps, who is the servant, who lowers himself, who is compassionate with all those in need”. And, said Francis, “when we say ‘those in need’ let us think not only of the homeless”, but also “of ourselves, of those of us, who

are in need”, Pope Francis said, “in need of Jesus’ words, of his caress — and also of those who are dear to us”. Offering a concrete example, the Pope described the image of a family gathered at the table: “so often people eat while watching TV or writing messages on their phones. Each person is indifferent to that encounter. Even right there at the core of society, which is the family, there is no encounter”, he said. Hence his final exhortation “to work for the culture of encounter, in a simple way, as Jesus did”.