



# The Holy See

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**POPE FRANCIS**

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE  
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE*

*Letter of Love*

*Friday, 11 November 2016*

(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

Christian love, being rooted in the Incarnation, is always “tangible”, and is often demonstrated through “works of mercy”, Pope Francis said at morning Mass on Friday, 11 November and the Casa Santa Marta. In his homily, he spoke of the risk of believing in the kind of “love” that is found in a “novel or a soap opera: worldly, philosophical, abstract, and soft”. The Pope warned against being seduced by the “process” of “intellectualizing and ideologising”, as this “strips away love”; it becomes a “sad spectacle of a God without Christ, of a Christ without the Church, and a Church without people”.

Francis began by reflecting on the day’s first reading (2 Jn 1:2-9), which he said seems like “a letter of one in love: it is a conversation of love between the shepherd and his spouse, the Church”. This conversation is “very delicate, very respectful”, to the point to where the Church is referred to as the “Elect Lady from God”.

It is with this “title full of love” that “the shepherd addresses the Church”. And he always “with great delicacy remembers that ‘to follow love’ is the commandment which we received from the Lord”.

As John’s letter states: “And now I beg you, Lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another”. It is an invitation to walk “in love”. However, it is truly “with great meekness and respect” that “the

shepherd addresses his Church, his spouse”.

“What kind of love is this?” Francis asks. “Because this word”, he explained, “is used today, but it is continuously used, for many things: this is love, that is love, this is love”. Therefore, it is necessary to understand “what love” is. Is “love, for instance, a novel or a soap opera, since this also says it is love?”. Or, is “love theoretical, philosophical?”.

In his letter, John cites the shepherd’s words to his spouse, and calls for attentiveness: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world”, the Pope said; these “offer another love, or another explanation of love”, and “even another explanation of Christian love, since it is so for them”.

“The criteria of Christian love”, the Pontiff said, “is the Incarnation of the Word”. In the reading, John is clear on this point: “There are, indeed, many deceivers in the world, who do not acknowledge the coming of Jesus in the flesh”. As the reading continues: “Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist!”. The Pope explained that “a love which does not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh is not the love with which God commands us: it is a worldly love, it is a philosophical love, it is an abstract love, it is a somewhat failed love, it is soft love”.

On the contrary, “the criteria for Christian love is the Incarnation of the Word”, Francis said. “Whoever says that Christian love is something else is the antichrist, who does not acknowledge that the Word came in the flesh”. Precisely “this is our truth: God sent his Son, who became Incarnate and made a life like us”. Because of this we must “love as Jesus loved; love as Jesus taught us; love, following Jesus’ example; love, walking along the path of Jesus”. Thus, “the path of Jesus gives life”.

The Pope turned to the day’s Gospel reading from Luke (17:26-37), where “Jesus admonishes us: Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it”.

Indeed, “he lost his life for love, finding it in the resurrection”. Therefore, “the only way to love as Jesus loved is to continuously step out of our own ego, and go out in the service of others”. The Apostle James, in his letter, emphasises this point “because Christian love is a tangible love, because the presence of God in Jesus Christ made flesh is tangible: the Incarnation of the Word”.

Turning back to the letter of John, repeating the words with which the shepherd “admonished” the “Lady”: “Be careful that you do not ruin what we have built, and that you receive full compensation”. It is an invitation to be wary, and more: “Whoever goes beyond and does not remain within the doctrine of Christ does not possess God. However, whoever remains within the doctrine, possesses the Father and the Son”. Therefore, the Pope explained, “the Word was made flesh, but you are also within an “incarnation”, in community, in the Church, since whoever goes beyond this doctrine of the flesh, goes beyond and does not remain in the doctrine of Christ, does not possess God”. And “this going beyond is a mystery: to leave the mystery of the Incarnation of

the Word, the Mystery of the Church, because the Church is the community around the presence of Christ, who goes beyond”.

Francis cited the Greek word “proagon” which he said is a “very strong” word that refers to those “who go, who journey beyond”. And “from there”, he said, “all the ideologies of love, the ideologies of the Church, the ideologies which remove the Church from Christ’s flesh, are born”. However, it is precisely “these ideologies which strip away the flesh of the Church”. It leads people to say: “Yes, I am Catholic, I am Christian; I love the whole world with a universal love”; yet, this “is very ethereal”. Instead, “love is always interior, tangible, and does not go beyond this doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word”.

“The life of the Church, belonging to the Church”, the Pontiff said, “is always within, goes beyond, emerges from the Church”. And thus, “whoever wishes to love not as Christ loves his spouse, the Church, with his own flesh and giving life, loves ideologically: they do not love with the all their body and with all their soul”. And “this way of theorizing, of being ideological, as well as the proposals of religiosity which removes the flesh of Christ, which removes the flesh of the Church, going beyond and ruining the community, ruining the Church”. We must “never go outside the womb of the mother, the holy hierarchical mother Church.

John’s letter reveals to us the love for the Church, and makes it apparent that “if we start theorizing about love, about journeying in love outside the Church, outside the Incarnation of the Word”, the Pope explained, “we will arrive at a reality which often appears in the history of the Church, even in our times: we will arrive at the transformation of what God wants, what he wanted with the Incarnation of the Word; we will arrive at a God without Christ, a Christ without the Church, and a Church without people”, and “everything, in this process of stripping the Church”.

Before continuing with the celebration, Francis asked the faithful to pray to “the Lord that our journey in love will never — never — make us an abstract love”. And that the love may instead be “tangible, with works of mercy”, in order to touch “the flesh of Christ there, of Christ incarnate”. It is “for this reason that the deacon Lawrence said that the poor are the treasure of the Church, since they are the suffering flesh of Christ”.

The Pope concluded, saying: We ask the Lord “for this grace to not go beyond, and not enter into this process, which can possibly seduce many people, to intellectualizing, to ideologising this love, stripping away the Church, stripping away Christian love”. And to not become a “sad spectacle of a God without Christ, of a Christ without the church, and a Church without people”.

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