



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Beautiful surprise

Monday, 28 November 2016

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

At the beginning of the liturgical year, as marked by the Advent calendar, every Christian, with their journey through the liturgy and through life is called to an “encounter” with Jesus. It is precisely this key word — “encounter” — that characterized the homily of Pope Francis during the Mass celebrated at Santa Marta, Monday, 28 November.

During the liturgy of the first Sunday of Advent, the Pontiff recalled, the Church “prayed in this way: ‘Oh God, our Father, grant your faithful the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom’”. This request is “for the Father to give us the will to go to encounter Jesus, encounter His son”. In fact, this is “the grace that we desire during Advent, and for which we ask: to have the desire to encounter Jesus” and therefore “to journey to encounter” with Him.

This period, Pope Francis stressed, is marked by “many encounters”: “from Jesus in His mother’s womb”, and “with Saint John the Baptist in the womb”, and later “with the shepherds”, and concluding “with the wise men” — not “liturgically” but “symbolically” — “with the great meeting between Jesus and His people, 2 February, when Jesus was brought to the temple at forty days”. Pope Francis added that “we hope to meet Him”. He said that, as of already yesterday, “there was a tree in the square. A sign. But, a sign that said: ‘Be watchful: you must encounter the Lord!’”. The Pope cited the responsorial Psalm: “Let us go rejoicing to encounter the Lord with joy to

encounter the Lord”.

Therefore, the Pontiff said, we are all once again invited to ask for “the grace to go to encounter” Christ. This, he added, is “a time to not be idle. Our heart must ask: ‘But how can I go to encounter the Lord? What are the behaviours I must have to encounter the Lord? How should I prepare my heart to encounter the Lord?’”.

The response to this question is always found in the liturgy of the day. Indeed, there are “three behaviours specified: vigilance in prayer, charitable deeds and jubilation in our devotion”. Namely, explained the Pontiff, “I must pray, with vigilance; I must act be active with charity and I must praise the Lord joyfully”.

Regarding charity, Francis clarified that he is speaking about “fraternal charity”: this means “not only giving alms, but also tolerating people that cause you discomfort, the children at home when they make too much noise, the husband or wife through difficulties, and mothers in law. In short, an ‘act of charity’”. In short: “we must experience this journey in this way, with the determination to meet the Lord and encounter him well. Do not be idle and we will encounter the Lord”.

But in the moment of the encounter, the Pontiff continued, “there will be a surprise, because He is the Lord of surprises”. Remembering the liturgical prayers which speak of “your Son who comes”, the Pope in fact noted that “He too is not be idle: He comes. I am on the journey to encounter Him and He is coming to meet me, and when we encounter we see that the great surprise is that He was looking for me before I began to look for him”. This is “the great surprise of the encounter with the Lord”. He looked for us first”. It is true that “our journey is important”, but “He is always first. He journeys to find us”.

The Pope went on to recall the “surprise of the centurion”. Francis reflected briefly on the scene: “He was not Jewish, and when he said that he would go to this prophet, to ask for forgiveness from this healer, someone said: ‘Do not interfere with the Jews, you do not know, but you will have problems with your superiors...’, though how much of this will he have heard!”. Nevertheless, this the centurion “was brave” and went to encounter the Lord. And “the great surprise was that the Lord desired to encounter him: ‘I will go, to cure him’”. This helps us to understand that “the Lord always goes first. We make a step and He makes ten. Always”.

It is the experience of “abandonment from grace, from His love, from his tenderness that He does not tire of searching for us”. The Pope explained that “we think that meeting the Lord will be a magnificent thing, but sometimes it is also with small things”, like with Naaman the Syrian from the Bible: “he too had a great surprise in God’s behaviour”.

“Ours”, Francis said, “is the God of surprises, the God who is searching for us, waiting for us, and only asks of us the small act of goodwill”. For this we pray: “oh God, grant your faithful, the

determination to go”, because this determination is “enough” for the Lord. This is valid for every aspect of “our life”. One could say, in fact: “Oh, I have this sin from years ago, this sin that tortures me, I have a life in this way, I have never recounted this of my life, it is a plague that I have inside, but how much I wish...”; but already this “how much I wish” is “enough” for the Lord. He in fact “gives forgiveness the moment I arrive to ask for forgiveness”. “Your desire is the first step” but God’s help “will guide us in our life”. In fact, explained the Pontiff, the Lord “sees us at a distance from Him many times”, and waits “like the Father of the prodigal son”. Often “he sees that we want to come closer” but he will leave “our encounter”.

Therefore, the Pope explained, the “encounter” is fundamental. Francis added: “To me, I have always been struck by what Pope Benedict said: that faith is not a theory, a philosophy, or an idea: it is an encounter. A encounter with Jesus”. Specifically: “you can recite the creed from memory, but not have faith if you have not encountered Jesus and his mercy”. Indeed, “the doctors of the law know everything, all of dogma from this period, all the morals of this period”, but “they did not have faith, because their hearts were far from God”. Everything stems from this dynamic: “To distance oneself or to have the desire to encounter”. The Pope concluded: It is precisely for this “forgiveness that we ask for today. ‘Oh God, our Father, grant your faithful, the resolve to run forth to encounter with your Christ’”, with “vigilance in prayer, charitable deeds and exultation of praise”. In doing this “we will encounter the Lord and we will have a beautiful surprise”.