



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

We are servants

Friday, 2 June

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Peter, conscious of being “the greatest sinner among the Apostles” — going so far as to have “denied the Lord” — but also aware of being chosen “to feed the people with love”, asked to be crucified “upside-down”. This was one of the images to which Pope Francis referred in his homily on Friday morning, 2 June, inspired by the dialogue between Jesus and Peter as recounted in the day’s passage from the Gospel of John (21:15-19).

“This dialogue between the Lord and Peter”, Pope Francis pointed out, “is a calm dialogue, between friends, a peaceful, subtle dialogue on the shore of the lake where Peter had been called at the beginning”. As the conversation unfolds, the Pope explained, Jesus uses words like “love, feed my sheep, follow me: peaceful words, words arising from the atmosphere of the resurrection” that “the Lord is carrying forth”. It is “a dialogue of friends and service, since it is taking place after the breakfast which Jesus himself prepared”. And it is a dialogue, the Pope continued, “in which Jesus, who is the Good Shepherd, entrusts his sheep to Peter”.

Thus, “a dialogue between friends”. And in fact Jesus asks Peter: “Do you love me? Love. And do you want to be my friend? Are you my friend?”. This, the Pope continued, “is the atmosphere of this dialogue, of this page of the Gospel so clearly peaceful, so clearly subtle”.

Francis chose to “point out three things” about “this dialogue”. The first was the phrase, “follow me”. Jesus, the Holy Father explained, “chose the greatest sinner of the Apostles: the others had also run away, but this one denied him”, saying: “I do not know him”. And yet “Jesus asks him: ‘Do you love me more than these?’”. Thus, the Pope affirmed, “Jesus chose the greatest of sinners”. In this regard, the Pope recalled, “there comes to my mind a dialogue between Jesus and a 17th century saint, a saint for whom Jesus had done many, many favours. It was a woman, a holy woman: ‘But Lord, to me who am so small, and so great a sinner”. And the Lord said: “Had I found a greater sinner than you, I would have given it to him”. Thus, the Pope continued, “the great sinner was chosen to tend the People of God, to ‘feed’ the People of God: it makes us think”.

The second point suggested by the Pope is “the word ‘love’” being used in this dialogue: “‘feed’, because you love me, ‘feed’, because you are my friend, ‘feed’”. And thus, “feed with love”. And “Peter takes this up in his first Letter: he has learned”. We should not “feed with our head held high, as a great dictator, no: feed with humility, with love, just as Jesus did”. And “this is the mission that Jesus gives to Peter: yes, with his sins, with his mistakes”, such that “right after this dialogue, Peter slips, makes a mistake: he is tempted by curiosity and he says to the Lord: ‘But this other disciple, where will he go, what will he do?’”. It is “with love, amid his mistakes, his sins, but with love”. Because “these sheep are not your sheep, they are my sheep”, says the Lord”. Thus, “love: if you are my friend, you must be their friend”.

The third point that springs from the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is exemplified by “two images”. There is the one “from Holy Thursday”, the Pope explained, “when Peter, sure of himself, with that same self-assurance with which he had said: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God’, then says to the servant of the High Priest: ‘I don’t know the man, I am not from his group’”. In other words, the Holy Father pointed out, “Peter denies Jesus and then their eyes meet: when Jesus goes out, He looks at him, and Peter, courageous, even courageous in his denial, is capable of weeping bitterly”. And “then after all of his life in service to the Lord”, Pope Francis added, “he ends up exactly like the Lord: on the cross. But he doesn’t boast”, saying: “I shall meet the same end as my Lord!”. No, he asks: “please, hang me on the cross upside-down, because at least in this way all can see that I am not the Lord; I am his servant”.

“This is what we can take from this dialogue, so beautiful, so peaceful, so friendly, so subtle”, the Pope said. He then concluded by asking “that the Lord give us all the grace to go about in life with our ‘head down’; with our head held high with the dignity God gives us, but with our head down, knowing that we are sinners and that Jesus alone is Lord: we are servants”.