



The Holy See

PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

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[Multimedia]

What great joy and consolation are offered us by the words of Saint John that we just heard: God so loves us that that he has made us his children, and, when we see him face-to-face, we shall discover all the more the greatness of his love (cf. *1 Jn* 3:1-10.19-22). Not only that. The love of God is always greater than anything we can imagine; it even reaches beyond any sin with which our conscience may charge us. His is an infinite love, one that knows no bounds. It is free of all those obstacles that we, for our part, tend to set in front of others, out of fear that they may strip us of our freedom.

We know that the state of sin distances us from God. But in fact, sin is the way that we distance *ourselves* from him. Yet that does not mean that God distances *himself* from us. The state of weakness and confusion that results from sin is one more reason for God to remain close to us. The certainty of this should accompany us throughout our lives. The words of the Apostle are a reassuring confirmation that our hearts should trust, always and unhesitatingly, in the Father's love: "No matter what our hearts may charge us with, God is greater than our hearts" (v. 20).

His grace is constantly at work in us, to strengthen our hope that his love will never be lacking, in spite of any sin we may have committed by rejecting his presence in our lives.

It is this hope that makes us realize at times that our life has lost its direction, as Peter did in the Gospel account that we heard. "And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times'. And he went out and wept bitterly" (*Mt* 26:74-75). The evangelist is extremely sober. The crowing of the cock startles a man

who is bewildered; he then recalls the words of Jesus, and at last the curtain is lifted. Peter begins to glimpse through his tears that God is revealed in Christ, who is buffeted and insulted, whom he himself has denied, yet who now goes off to die for him. Peter, who wanted to die for Jesus, now realizes that he must let Jesus die for him. Peter wanted to teach the Master; he wanted to go before him. Instead, it is Jesus who goes off to die for Peter. Peter had not understood this; he didn't want to understand it.

Peter is now confronted with the Lord's charity. Finally he understands that the Lord loves him and asks him to let himself be loved. Peter realizes that he had always refused to let himself be loved. He had always refused to let himself be saved by Jesus alone, and so he did not want Jesus to love him completely.

How truly difficult it is to let ourselves be loved! We would always like a part of us to be freed of the debt of gratitude, while in reality we are completely indebted, because God loved us first and, with love, he saves us completely.

Let us now ask the Lord for the grace to know the greatness of his love, which wipes away our every sin.

Let us allow ourselves to be purified by love, in order to recognize true love!