



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The Gospel in hand

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Read a page of the Gospel every day, for “10, 15 minutes and no more”, keep your “eyes fixed on Jesus” in order to imagine yourself “in the scene and to speak with Jesus” about what comes from the heart. These are the characteristics of “contemplative prayer”, a true source of hope for our life. Pope Francis offered this recommendation during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning.

In the First Reading (Heb 12:1-4), Francis noted, “the author of the Letter to the Hebrews refers to the memory of the first days after conversion, after the encounter with Jesus, and also refers to the memory of our fathers: “how much they suffered when they were on the journey”. The author, “looking to these fathers says: we too ‘are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses’”. Thus, it is “the testimony of our ancestors” that he recalls. And “he also recalls our experience, when we were so happy in the first encounter with Jesus”. This “is the memory, which we spoke about as a point of reference for Christian life”.

But today, the Pope remarked, “the author of the letter speaks about another point of reference, namely, hope”. And “he tells us that we must have the courage to go forward: let us persevere in running the race that lies before us”. Then “he says what is the very core of hope: ‘keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus’”. This is the point: “if we don’t keep our eyes fixed on Jesus it is difficult for us to have hope”. We can perhaps be “optimistic, be positive, but hope?”.

After all, Francis explained, “hope is learned only by looking to Jesus, contemplating Jesus; we learn through contemplative prayer”. This was what he wished “to talk about today”, fuelling his reflection with a question: “I can ask you: how do you pray?”. Someone, he said, might respond: “Father, I say the prayers I learned as a child”. And he said: “Okay, this is good”. Someone else might add: “I pray the rosary too, every day!”. And the Pope confirmed: “It’s good to pray the rosary every day”. And finally, one might say: “I also talk with the Lord, when I have a problem, or with Our Lady or with the saints...”. And “this is good” too.

With regard to all of this, the Pontiff posed another question: “Do you pray in contemplation?”. The question might throw us a curve, and someone might ask: “What is this, Father? What is this prayer? Where can we buy it? How do we do it?”. Francis’ answer is simple: “It can be done only with the Gospel in hand”. Basically, he said, “you pick up the Gospel, select a passage, read it once, read it twice; imagine, as if you see what is happening, and contemplate Jesus”.

To provide some practical guidance, the Pope gave an example from the day’s Liturgy, a passage from the Gospel according to Mark (5:21-43), which “teaches us many beautiful things”. Beginning from this page, he asked: “How do I contemplate with today’s Gospel?”. And, sharing his personal experience, he proposed the first reflection: “I see that Jesus was in the midst of the crowd, there was a great crowd around Him. The word ‘crowd’ is used five times this passage. But doesn’t Jesus rest? I can imagine: always with the crowd! Most of Jesus’ life is spent on the street, with the crowd. Doesn’t He rest? Yes, once: the Gospel says that He slept on the boat, but the storm came and the disciples woke Him. Jesus was constantly among the people”.

For this reason, the Pope suggested, “we look to Jesus this way, I contemplate Jesus this way, I imagine Jesus this way. And I say to Jesus whatever comes to my mind to say to Him”.

Francis continued his meditation with these words: “Then, in the midst of the crowd, there was that sick woman, and Jesus was aware. But how did Jesus, in the middle of so many people, realize that a woman had touched Him?”. And, indeed, He asked directly: “Who touched me?”. The disciples, in return, pointed out to Jesus: “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’”. The question, Francis emphasized, is that “Jesus not only understands the crowd, feels the crowd, but He hears the beating of each one of our hearts, of each one of us: He cares for all and for each one, always!”.

The Pope, continuing to re-read the passage from Mark, explained that the same situation happens again when the ruler of the Synagogue approaches Jesus “to tell Him about his gravely ill little daughter. And He leaves everything to tend to this one: Jesus in the great and in the small, always!”. Then, Francis continued, “we can go on and see that He arrives at the house, He sees that tumult, those women who were called to mourn over the dead body, wailing, weeping”. But Jesus says: “Don’t worry: she’s sleeping!”. And in response to these words, some even begin to scoff at Him. However, “He stays quiet” and with his patience he manages to bear this situation, to

avoid responding to those who mock Him.

The Gospel account culminates with “the little girl’s resurrection”. And Jesus, “rather than saying: ‘Praised be God!’, says to them: ‘Please, give her something to eat’”. For Jesus “always has the fine details in front of Him”, the Pope explained.

“What I did with this Gospel”, Francis explained, “is contemplative prayer: to pick up the Gospel, read and imagine myself in the scene, to imagine what’s happening and speak with Jesus” about what “comes from my heart”. And with this, he continued, “we allow hope to grow, because we have our eyes fixed on Jesus”. Then he proposed: “pray in contemplation”. And even if we have many commitments, he said, we can always find the time, even 15 minutes at home: Pick up the Gospel, a short passage, imagine what is happening and talk to Jesus about it”. This way “your eyes will be fixed on Jesus, and not so much on soap operas, for example: your ears will be fixed on the words of Jesus and not so much on the neighbours’ gossip.

“Contemplative prayer helps us to hope” and teaches us “to live from the substance of the Gospel, the Bishop of Rome persisted. And this is why we must “always pray: say prayers, pray the rosary, speak with the Lord, but also carry out this contemplative prayer in order to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus”. From here “comes hope”. And also this way, “our Christian life moves within that framework, between memory and hope: the memory of the entire past journey, the memory of so many graces received from the Lord; and hope, looking to the Lord, who is the only One who can give me hope”. And “to look to the Lord, to know the Lord, we pick up the Gospel and we pray in contemplation”.

In closing, Francis again repeated the experience of praying in contemplation: “Today for example”, he suggested, “find 10 minutes, 15 minutes and no more: read the Gospel, imagine and speak with Jesus. And nothing more. And in this way, your knowledge of Jesus will be greater and your hope will grow. Don’t forget, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus”. This is why we call it “contemplative prayer”.