



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Ode to joy

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“The identity card of a Christian is joy”. “Amazement” before the “greatness of God”, before his “love” and the “salvation” he has given to humanity, leads the believer to a joy that none of life’s crosses can tarnish, because even trials are a “certainty that Jesus is with us”.

Inspired by the liturgy of the day, Pope Francis’ homily was a true ode to joy at the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Monday morning. The Pope wanted to specifically re-read the opening words of the song taken from the First Letter of Peter (1:3-9) which, he said, because of its “exultant tone”, its “joyfulness” and the apostle’s way of intervening “with full force”, recalls the beginning “of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio”. Peter, in fact, writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”.

These are words in which one perceives “wonder before the greatness of God”, before the “regeneration that the Lord — ‘in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ’ — has made in us”. It is an astonishment that is full of triumph and cheerfulness”. Immediately after, the Pope noted, we

see the “key phrase” of the letter’s text, namely: “In this you rejoice”.

The joy the apostle speaks of is lasting. For this reason, Pope Francis explained, Peter adds in the epistle that, even if for a little while you are forced to “suffer various trials”, this joy from the beginning “will not be taken away”. In fact, it stems from “what God has done in us: he has regenerated us in Christ and has given us hope”. A hope “which the early Christians depicted as an anchor in heaven”, and which, the Pope said, is also ours. This is where joy comes from. Peter concludes his message inviting everyone to “rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy”.

From all of this, the Pontiff emphasized, we understand that joy is truly the “virtue of a Christian”. A Christian, he noted, “is a man or woman who has joy in their heart”. Even more: “There can be no Christian without joy”. Someone might object, saying: “But Father, I have seen many!”. These people “are not Christians: they say that they are, but they are not, they are missing something”. That is why, the Pope said, “the identity card of a Christian is his joy, the joy of the Gospel, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of the hope that Jesus is waiting for us”. The Pope added that “in the crosses and sufferings of this life”, Christians live that joy, expressing it in another way, with the “peace” that comes from the “assurance that Jesus accompanies us, that he is with us”. In fact, Christians see that “this joy grows with trust in God”. They know well that “God remembers them, God loves them, God accompanies them and is waiting for them. This is joy”.

In contrast to this ode to joy, the liturgy of the day proposes “another word”, one linked to the scene from the Gospel of Mark (10:17-27) in which we read about the young man “who approached Jesus in order to follow him”. He was a “good young man”, capable of “conquering Jesus’ heart”, who, we read, “fixed his gaze upon him” and “loved him”. Jesus made a proposal to this young man: “There is one thing you lack: sell all that you have, give everything to the poor and come, follow me”; but upon hearing these words the man’s “face was grim and he went away sorrowful”.

The young man, Pope Francis noted, “was unable to open his heart to joy and chose sadness”. Why was this? The answer is clear: “Because he had many possessions. He was attached to goods”. Furthermore, Jesus himself warned that “one cannot serve two masters: you either serve the Lord or you serve riches”. Referring to a theme that he spoke about a few days ago, the Pope explained: “riches are not bad in themselves”, but it is bad when one “serves these riches”. And so it was that the young man went away sad: “His face was grim and he went away sorrowful”.

This scene also sheds light upon our daily life “in our parishes, communities and institutions”. Indeed, the Pope said, if “we find people who say they are Christian, and want to be Christian, but are sad”, it means that something is “not right”. It is the duty of everyone to help these people “to find Jesus, to take away that sadness, so that they may rejoice in the Gospel and have this joy which is truly of the Gospel”.

Pope Francis wanted to expand upon this central concept, and to link joy to the amazement that emerges — as Peter recalls in his letter — “before revelation, before the love of God, before the emotions of the Holy Spirit”. Therefore we can say that “a Christian is a man or woman of amazement”.

One word — “amazement” — which also returns at the end of the Gospel passage of the day, “when Jesus explains to the apostles how this good young man could not follow him, because he was attached to riches, and says that it is very difficult for the rich, those who are attached to riches, to enter the kingdom of Heaven”. We read that they were “more astonished” and asked: “who can be saved?”.

The Pope explained that a man, a Christian, can be so amazed before such greatness and beauty, that one might think: “I cannot do it. I do not know how to do it!”. But looking at his disciples faces, Jesus gives them the consoling answer: “It is impossible for men — man cannot do it... — but it is not so for God!”. We can, therefore, live “Christian joy”, the “wonder of joy” and be saved “from a life attached to things, to worldliness”, only “with the strength of God, the strength of the Holy Spirit”.

Therefore, the Pope concluded his homily with an invitation, saying “let us ask the Lord today to give us amazement before him, before the many spiritual treasures he has given us; and with this amazement that he give us joy, the joy of our lives and of living amidst many difficulties with peace in our hearts; May he protect us from seeking happiness in the many things that ultimately make us sad: things that promise much, but will not give us anything”. In conclusion, “remember this well: a Christian is a man or woman of joy, of joy in the Lord; a man or woman of wonder”.