



# The Holy See

---

**POPE FRANCIS**

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE  
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE*

*Returning home*

*Monday, 24 February 2014*

*(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 9, 28 February 2014)*

Pope Francis commented on the day's Gospel from St Mark (9:14-29). There the evangelist recounts Jesus freeing a boy from a demon.

The Pope introduced his reflection by explaining the broader context of the episode: "Jesus was coming down the mountain where he had been transfigured, and he found himself among a restless, disorderly crowd that was arguing and shouting". When "Jesus asked them what had happened, the restless din lessened" and he began to speak with the father of the boy who was possessed while all of the onlookers "listened in silence". When, at last Jesus, freed him, "the boy was like a corpse". So much so that many people believed him dead. But "Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up and had him stand". The boy was finally healed and could return home with his family.

The Holy Father observed that "all the disorder, all the discussion, ended in a gesture: Jesus bent down and took the child by the hand". He noted that "these gestures of Jesus make us think". In fact, he said, "when Jesus heals, when he goes among the people and heals a person, he never leaves him alone.... He is not a magician, warlock, or a healer who goes and heals" and then continues on his way. Rather, he first has "everyone return to his proper place, he does not leave anyone on the road alone".

The Pope then presented several of “the Lord’s beautiful gestures” that we find narrated in the Gospel. “We think of the little girl, Jarius’ daughter. When Jesus brings her back to life, he looks at her parents and says: give her something to eat!”. Thus he reassures the girl’s father, as if saying to him: “Your daughter is returning home, she is returning to her family”. He acted in the same way “with Lazarus, when he came out of the tomb” and with “the dead boy, whose widowed mother followed behind the coffin: the Lord raised the boy and gave him back to his mother”.

“Jesus always makes us return home, he never leaves us on the road alone”. It is a style we also find in the parables, the Pope added. Thus, for example, “the lost coin ended up in the widow’s purse with the others. And the lost sheep was brought back to the herd with the others”.

“Jesus is the son of a people; Jesus is the promise made to a people,” the Pope said. “Jesus’ gestures teach us that every healing, every act of forgiveness, always brings us back to our people, that is, to the Church”.

To further clarify his reflection, the Pope drew two additional examples from the Gospel. “Many times,” he said, “Jesus performed inexplicable gestures ... towards those who had been distanced from the community after having been condemned by their fellow citizens”. Among them “we find Zacchaeus, who really was a crook and a traitor to his country”. And yet Jesus rejoices over him. “And we think of Matthew, another traitor to the homeland who gave money to the Romans”. Here again, Jesus “goes to a feast at his home: a wonderful meal!” The practical teaching is that “when Jesus forgives he always has us return home”. Therefore, “one cannot understand Jesus without understanding the people whence he comes, God’s chosen people, the people of Israel. And one cannot understand him without understanding the people he has called to himself: i.e., the Church”.

Pope Francis then recalled a saying of Paul VI which is particularly dear to him: “It is absurd to love Christ without the Church, to listen to Christ but not to the Church, to follow Christ on the margins of the Church”. And he added: “Christ and the Church are one. The deepest and greatest theology speaks to us of a wedding: Christ the Bridegroom, the Church the Bride”. Thus “each time Christ calls a person, he leads him to the Church”. Just think of “a child who comes to be baptized”: he receives baptism “in Mother Church, who accompanies her children and leaves them in the hands of the other Mother of the last moments of life, our Mother and the Mother of Jesus”.

“Jesus’ tender gestures enable us to understand that our doctrine, let’s put it this way, or our following of Christ, is not an idea. It is a continual abiding at home. And if it is a possibility, and a reality, for each of us to leave home through a sin or mistake ... salvation comes in returning home: with Jesus in the Church”. Therefore, the Pope said, “through these one to one gestures of tenderness, the Lord calls us into his people, into his family: our Mother, the holy Church”.

The Pope then invited all those who were present at the morning Mass to think about “Jesus’

gestures: let us imagine how Jesus acted with so many people” whom he encountered along the way. They are “little gestures” but they are “gestures of tenderness which speak to us of a people, of a family, of a mother”. And they remind us that “the salvation that Jesus brings always leads us home”. The Pope concluded by asking “our Mother, Our Lady” for “the grace to understand this mystery”.