



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

No fear of joy

Thursday, 24 April 2014

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 17, 25 April 2014)

In his homily at Holy Mass on Thursday, 24 April, Pope Francis reflected on the contrast between what the Apostles felt after the Lord's Resurrection: on the one hand, they were filled with joy at the thought that he had risen; on the other, they were fearful at seeing him among them once again and of entering once more into contact with the mystery.

Drawing on the day's Gospel passage from Luke (24:35-48), the Pope recalled that "on the evening of the Resurrection the disciples were talking about what they had seen": the two disciples from Emmaus spoke about their encounter with Jesus on the road, and how he had also appeared to Peter. "They were all happy because the Lord had risen: they were sure that the Lord had risen". However, as they were speaking, the Gospel says, "Jesus himself stood among them" and greeted them saying: "Peace be with you".

At that moment, the Pope noted, that the completely unexpected happened: something other than peace. In fact, the Gospel describes the Apostles as "startled and frightened". They "didn't know what to do, and supposed that they had seen a spirit". Thus, the Pope continued, Jesus sought most of all to reassure them: "look, I am not a spirit, touch me, look at my wounds!"

"There is a word in this Gospel passage that explains well for us what had happened at that moment", the Pope said. We read in the text: "And while they still disbelieved for joy ...". This is the

focal point: the disciples “could not believe because they were afraid of joy”. Jesus “leads them to joy: the joy of the Resurrection, the joy of his presence among them”. However, for them this joy posed “a problem for belief: they disbelieved for joy and they were full of amazement”.

Essentially, Pope Francis said, the disciples “preferred to think that Jesus was an idea, a spirit, but not a reality”. Therefore, “Jesus’ whole task was to make them understand that he was real: “Give me something to eat, touch me, it is !! A spirit does not have flesh, does not have a body, it is !!”. Furthermore, the Pope continued, “let’s remember that this occurred after several of them had seen him during the day: they were sure he was alive. Then we don’t know what happened...”.

The Gospel passage suggests that “the fear of joy is a Christian illness”, the Pope remarked. We too “are afraid of joy” and we tell ourselves that “it is better to think: yes, God exists, but he is out there. Jesus is risen, he is out there!”. We tell ourselves: let’s keep “a little distance ... we are afraid of Jesus’ closeness because this brings us joy”.

This attitude also explains why there are so many “funeral Christians” for whom “life seems like a continual funeral”. Christians who “prefer sadness and not joy; they move better, not in the light of joy, but in the shadows”. Just “like those animals”, the Pope said, “that manage to go out at night but don’t see anything in the light of day. Like bats! And with a little bit of humour we can say that they are ‘bat Christians’ who prefer the shadows to the light of the presence of the Lord”.

“We are afraid of joy”, the Pope repeated, “and Jesus, by his Resurrection, gives us joy: the joy of being Christians, the joy of following him closely, the joy of taking the road of the beatitudes, the joy of being with him”. Instead, “many times we are either startled when this joy comes to meet us, or we are full of fear: either we believe we are seeing a ghost, or we think that Jesus is a way of acting”; indeed, we say “we are Christians and we have to do it this way!”. Rather, we should ask ourselves: “Do you speak with Jesus? Do you tell him: Jesus, I believe that you are alive, that you are risen, that you are close to me, that you will not abandon me”? This is the “dialogue with Jesus” which is proper to the Christian life and is enlivened by the knowledge that “Jesus is always with us, he is always with our problems, with our struggles and with our good works”.

Therefore, the Pope reiterated, we need to overcome “the fear of joy”; we need to think of the many times that “we are not joyful because we are afraid”. Like the disciples who “were startled and frightened” by the mystery of the Cross. This was the cause of their fear. “In my homeland”, Pope Francis said, “there is a saying that goes like this: when someone gets burned by boiling milk, he cries when he sees the cow”. The disciples, who were “burned by the drama of the Cross, said: no, let’s stop here! He is in heaven, that’s excellent, he is risen, but may he not come back again because we can’t take handle it!”.

Pope Francis concluded his meditation asking the Lord that he “may do for us all what he did for the disciples who were afraid of joy: open our minds”. Indeed, in the Gospel we read: “He opened

their minds to understand the Scriptures”. The Pope therefore expressed his hope “that the Lord may open our minds and make us understand that he is a living reality, that he has a body, that he is with us and that he accompanies us, that he has conquered: let us ask the Lord for the grace not to be afraid of joy”.