



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAEHOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Return to God and return to the embrace of the Father"

Friday, 20 March 2020

[[Multimedia](#)]

Introduction

Yesterday, I received a message from a priest from Bergamo, who asks that we pray for the doctors of Bergamo, Treviglio, Brescia, Cremona, who are working at the end of their strength; they are giving their lives to help those who are ill, to save others' lives. And let us pray also for those in positions of responsibility. It is not easy for them to manage this moment and very often they suffer from being misunderstood. Whether they are doctors, hospital staff, health care volunteers or civil authorities. Right now they are pillars helping us to move forward and defend us in this crisis. Let us pray for them.

Homily

When I read or listen to this passage from the prophet Hosea, which we heard in the First Reading (cf. 14:2-10), which says "Return Israel, to the Lord, your God" (v. 2), "return"... When I hear it, I remember a song that Carlo Buti sang 75 years ago. The Italian families in Buenos Aires used to listen to it. They liked it a lot. "Return to your daddy. He will still sing you a lullaby". "Return." It is your daddy who tells you to return. God is your Daddy, not a judge. He is your Daddy. "Come home, listen, come". And that memory - I was still just a boy - leads me straight away to the father in Chapter 15 of Luke, that father who, it says, "while he was still a long way off, ... saw him" (cf v. 20), that son who had gone away with all his money and squandered it (vv. 13-14). If he sees him from a distance, it's because He was waiting for him. How many times He went up the terrace day

after day, month after month, perhaps years even. He waited for His son. He saw him from afar (cf. v. 20). Return to your Daddy, return to your Father. He is waiting for you. It is God's tenderness that speaks to us, especially during Lent. It is the time to enter into ourselves and to remember the Father, to return to our Daddy.

"No, father, I am ashamed to return because... You know, father, I have done many things, I have done so many things wrong...". What does the Lord say? "Return, I heal their disloyalty, I will love them with all my heart, for my anger has turned from them. I will fall like dew on Israel. He shall bloom like the lily, and thrust out roots like the poplar" (cf. *Hos* 14:5-6). Return to your father who awaits you. The God of tenderness will heal us. He will heal us from so many of life's wounds, of the many bad things we have done. Everyone has their own!

Let us think of this: Going back to God is going back to an embrace, the Father's embrace. And let us think of that other promise that Isaiah makes: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (cf. 1:18). He is capable of transforming us, He is capable of changing our hearts, but we must make the first step: to return. It is not going to God, no. It is going back home.

And Lent always focuses on this conversion of the heart that, in the Christian way of life, takes form in the sacrament of Confession. It is the moment to... I don't know whether to say "settle accounts", I don't like that - to let God "whiten" us, to let God "purify" us, to let God embrace us.

I know that many of you go to confession before Easter so you can be right with God again. But many will say to me today: "But, Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, when I can't leave the house? And I want to make peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me. I want my Daddy to embrace me... How can I do it if I can't find a priest?" Do what the Catechism says.

It is very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He is your Father. Tell Him the truth: 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an Act of Contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession, but forgive me now.' You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near to God's forgiveness, as the Catechism teaches us, without having a priest at hand. Think about it: this is the moment! This is the right moment, the appropriate moment. An Act of Contrition, made well. In this way our souls will become as white as snow.

It would be good if today this "Return" could echo in our ears, this "Return to your Daddy, return to your Father". He is waiting for you and will throw a feast for you.