



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The tree of the Cross

Saturday, 14 September 2013

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The story of man and the story of God are interwoven on the Cross and essentially weave a love story. It is an immense mystery which we are unable to understand on our own. How can we “try a taste of that aloe honey, that bitter sweetness of Jesus’ sacrifice?” Pope Francis explained how to do so on Saturday morning, 14 September, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, at the Mass he celebrated in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

In commenting on the day’s readings — from the Letter to the Philippians (2:6-11) and from John’s Gospel (3:13-17) — the Pope said we can grasp “something” of the mystery of the Cross “on our knees in prayer”, and in “tears” as well. Indeed, tears actually “bring us close to this mystery”. “Without shedding tears”, and especially without “heartfelt tears, we shall never understand this mystery”. It is the “weeping of the penitent, the weeping of our brother and sister who see so many human miseries and likewise see them in Jesus, on his knees weeping”.

The Church Fathers, the Pope said, “always compared the tree of Paradise with the tree of sin; the tree that bears the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, of knowledge, with the tree of the Cross”. The tree of Paradise “did such great harm”, whereas the tree of the Cross “brings us salvation and health, and pardons that harm”. It is this “itinerary that human history follows”. It is a

way that enables us “to encounter Jesus Christ the Redeemer, who lays down his life for love”.

The tree of the Cross tells the story of God who “wanted to take on our history and to walk beside us”. In the First Reading the Apostle Paul “sums up the whole of God’s story in few words: Jesus Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not consider it a privilege to be like God”. Rather, the Pope explained, he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”. Indeed Christ “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross.” This is “the itinerary that God’s story followed”. But, the Bishop of Rome wondered, why did it do so? The answer is found in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: “for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. God, Pope Francis concluded, “took this itinerary out of love, there is no other explanation”.