



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The last step

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On the Christian path “there is no place for hatred”. If, as “children”, believers want to “resemble the Father”, they must not be confined to the “letter of the law”, but instead they must live the “commandment of love” each day. Being able “to pray for your enemies”: that is the “last step” you must climb, which is necessary in order to heal “wounded hearts from sin”. In the Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, Pope Francis said that Jesus, overturning the idea of “neighbour”, came to bring the law to “fullness”. In fact, the Pope said, Jesus did “not come to cancel the law”, as his enemies accused him of doing, but “to bring it to fulfillment”. Everything “to the last iota”.

At the time, the doctors of the law gave “explanations which were too theoretical, like case studies”. It was a vision, the Pope explained, “which did not include the heart of the law, which is the love” that is given “to us” by God. The centre was no longer the “greatest commandment” in the Old Testament — “to love God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your soul, and your neighbour as yourself” — but instead a case study that sought only to understand: “Can you do this? To what point can you do this? And if you cannot?”.

Jesus, therefore, “taking inspiration from the commandments”, seeks to recover “the true meaning of the law so as to bring it to its fullness”. In this way, for example, with regard to the fifth

commandment, he recalls: “It has been said: ‘Thou shalt not kill’. This is true! But if you insult your brother, you are killing”. That is to say, the Pope explained, that “there are many forms, many ways of killing”. In this way “he refines the law”. And again, he says: “If your brother asks you for your shirt, give him your coat as well! If he asks you to walk a kilometre with him, go two!”. Jesus always asks for something that is “more generous”, the Pope said, because “love is more generous than the letter of the law”.

This “work” of improving is not just “for the fulfillment of the law, but it is work for the healing of the heart”. In the Gospel passages in which Jesus continues his explanation of the commandments, Pope Francis said, there “is a healing process for the heart wounded by original sin”. It is a journey proposed to everyone, because “we all have a heart wounded by sin, everyone”. And since Jesus recommends that we be “perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”, so as to “resemble the Father”, in order to be true “children” we must indeed follow “this path of healing”.

Inspired by the Gospel passage in the liturgy of the day, from the Gospel of Matthew (5:43-48), — in which Jesus says: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’”. He then adds: “But I say to you, Love your enemies”. The Pope pointed out that on this path “there is no place for hatred”. The bar is raised even higher: first, Jesus “leads us to give more to our brothers and our friends”, and now even “to our enemies”. In fact, “the last step of the stairs” to recovery brings with it this recommendation: “Pray for those who persecute you”.

This commandment — to “pray for our enemies” — can floor us, because due to “the wound that we all have in our hearts”, we naturally wish “something a bit bad” towards an enemy who slanders us, for example. Instead, “Jesus tells us: ‘No, no! Pray for him and do penance for him’”.

In this regard, the Pope recalled that when he was a boy he heard someone speak about “one of the great dictators of the world after the war”, and this person said: “May God take him to hell as soon as possible”. Though the heart may give this feeling immediately, the new commandment instead says: “Pray for him”. Of course, the Pope added, “it is easier to pray for someone who is far, far away, for a dictator who is far away, than to pray for those who have hurt me”. Yet this is precisely what “Jesus asks of us”. One might ask: “Why so much generosity, Lord?”. Jesus gives the answer precisely in the Gospel: so as to be “children of your Father who is in heaven”. If “the Father does” so, we too are called to do the same in order to be “children”. This “healing of the heart”, in other words, “leads us to become children”. And what does the Father do? “He makes his sun rise on the bad and on the good; he sends rain on the just and on the unjust”, because “he is the Father of all”.

One might object, asking: Is God also the Father “of that criminal, of that dictator?”. The answer is clear: “Yes, he is their father! Just as he is my father! He never denies his paternity!”. And if we want to “resemble” him, we must take “this path”. In fact, Jesus concluded his discourse by saying: “And be perfect as your Father is perfect”. In other words, the Pope explained, we are offered “a

path that has no end”, because “every day we have to do something”.

In this regard Pope Francis proposed “a practical thing”, to ask ourselves: “Do I pray for my enemies or do I wish something bad for them?”. It’s enough to think about it for “five minutes, no more”, to ask: “Who are my enemies, who has hurt me, who is it that I don’t love or who am I distanced from? Who are they? Do I pray for them?”. Let each person “give an answer”, the Pope said. He concluded: “May the Lord give us the grace” to “pray for our enemies; to pray for those who wish us ill, who do not love us; to pray for those who do us harm, who persecute us”, using “their full names”. We will see that this prayer will bear two fruits: it will improve our enemy, “because prayer is powerful”; and it “will make us more as children of the Father”.