



The Holy See

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

"Living at home, but not feeling at home"

Saturday, 14 March 2020

[[Multimedia](#)]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray for those who are sick as a result of this pandemic. Today, I would like to ask for a special prayer for families, families who from one day to the next find themselves at home with their children because schools are closed for safety reasons, and have to manage a difficult situation and manage it well, with peace and also with joy. I think especially of families with members with disabilities. Welcome centres for people with disabilities are closed and the people remain in their families. Let us pray for families so that they don't lose peace at this time and that they might succeed to carry the whole family forward with strength and joy.

Homily

We have often heard this passage from the Gospel (cfr *Lk 15:1-3, 11-32*). Jesus tells this parable in a special context: "The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what He had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man,' they said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (vv. 1-2). And Jesus answers them with this parable.

What do they say? The people, the sinners, approach in silence. They do not know what to say, but their presence says many things. They wanted to listen. The doctors of the law, what do they say? They criticise. They "complained", the Gospel says, trying to eradicate the authority Jesus had with the people. This is the great accusation: "He eats with sinners, He is impure".

The parable is in part an explanation of this situation, of this problem. What do they feel? The people feel in need of salvation. The people do not know how to distinguish well, intellectually: "I need to find my Lord, who fills me". They need a guide, a shepherd. And the people approach Jesus because they see in Him a shepherd. They need to be helped to walk in life. They feel this need. The others, the doctors, feel self-sufficient: "We went to university", "I have a doctorate, no, two doctorates. I know very, very well what the law says. Actually, I know every single explanation of the law in detail". And they feel self-sufficient and they despise the people, they despise sinners: disdain for sinners.

In the parable, the same one, what do they say? The son says to the Father: "Give me the money and I'll be on my way" (see v. 12). The Father gives, but says nothing, because he is a father. Perhaps he remembered some boyish pranks he did when young, but he says nothing. A father knows how to suffer in silence. A father bides his time. He lets the bad moments pass. At times the attitude of a father is to "play the fool" in the face of his children's shortcomings. The other son rebukes the father: "You have been unjust".

And what do those in the parable feel? The boy feels the desire to "eat the world", to go beyond, to get out of the house, which perhaps he experiences as a jail. And he also has the front to say to his father, "Give me what is mine". He feels he has courage, power. What does the father feel? The father feels pain, tenderness and great love. Then when the son says those other words: "I will leave this place and go to my father" (v. 18) he finds the father who awaits him, who sees him from afar (cf. v. 20). A father who knows how to bide his time for his children. And what does the elder brother feel? The Gospel says: "He became angry" (v. 28), he feels this indignation. And at times being indignant is the only way these people can feel deserving.

These are the things that *are said* in this passage of the Gospel, and the things that *are felt*.

But what is the problem? The problem - let's begin with the elder brother - the problem is that he was at home, but he never understood what it meant to live at home. He did his duties, he did his work, but he did not understand what a relationship of love with his father was. That son "became angry and refused to go in" (v. 28). "But is this not my home?" he thought. The same as the doctors of the law. "There is no order, this sinner has come here and they throw a party for him. What about me?" The father tells him clearly: "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (v. 31). And this son did not realise this. he lived at home as if it were a hotel, without feeling that fatherliness... Many "guests" in the house of the Church feel that they are the owners! It is interesting: the father does not say a word to the son who returns from sin. He simply kisses him, embraces him and celebrates his return (cf. v. 20). Instead, to this [the elder] one he has to explain to enter into his heart. His heart was "protecting itself" because of his concepts of fatherhood, sonship, of the way to live.

I remember once a wise elderly priest - a great confessor, a missionary, a man who greatly loved

the Church. Who spoke of a young priest, very sure of himself, a great believer, who thought he was worth something and that he had rights in the Church. He said: "This is what I pray for: that the Lord might put a banana peel in front of him to make him slip. That would do him good". It was as if he had said - it seems like blasphemy - "It would be good for him to sin because he will need to ask for forgiveness and find the Father".

This parable tells us many things about the Lord. It is the answer to those who criticised Him because He kept the company of sinners. But even today too there are many, people of the Church, who criticise those who approach people in need, humble people, who work, even those who work for us. May the Lord give us the grace to understand what the problem is. The problem is living at home but not feeling at home, because there is no paternal or fraternal relationship; there is merely the relationship of companions at work.