



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Love is not a soap opera

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In his homily at Holy Mass Pope Francis commented on the first Reading from the Letter of St John (4:11-18), wherein the word abide recurs almost as a refrain. The Apostle John tells us many times that we should abide in the Lord, the Pope said. And he also tells us that the Lord abides in us. Essentially, he said, St John sums up the Christian life as an abiding, as a mutual indwelling we in God and God in us. Do not abide in the spirit of the world, do not abide in superficiality, do not abide in idolatry, do not abide in vanity. No, abide in the Lord! the Holy Father said. And the Lord, he added, reciprocates this so that he remains in us. Indeed, he first remains in us even though many times we turn him away. Yet if we do, we cannot remain in him.

He who abides in love abides in God and God in him, St John writes further on. In practice, the Pope said, the Apostle tells us how this abiding is the same as abiding in love. And he added that it is beautiful to hear this said about love. Yet he warned that the love of which John speaks is not the love of which soap operas are made! No, it is something else!.

In fact, the Holy Father continued: Christian love always possesses one quality: concreteness. Christian love is concrete. Jesus himself, when he speaks of love, tells us concrete things: feed the hungry, visit the sick. They are all concrete things for indeed love is concrete.

Pope Francis then warned: When this concreteness is lacking we end up living a Christianity of illusions, for we do not understand the heart of Jesus message. Love that is not concrete, he said, becomes an illusory love. Citing the days Gospel from St Mark (6:45-52), he explained that the disciples had this sort of love when they looked at Jesus and believed they were seeing a ghost and an illusory love that is not concrete does not do us good.

But when does this occur? the Pope asked. The Gospel, he said, could not be clearer. When the disciples believed they are seeing a ghost, the Holy Father said quoting the Gospel text, they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. And if your heart is hardened, you cannot love. You think that to love is to imagine things. No, love is concrete!.

There is a basic criteria for truly living in love, he continued. The criteria is to abide in the Lord and the Lord in us, and the criteria of Christian concreteness is the same, always: The Word came in the flesh. The criteria is the Incarnation of the Word, God made Man and Christianity without this foundation is not true Christianity. The key to Christian life is faith in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made Man.

Pope Francis also suggested a way to get to know the style of concrete love. He explained that there are several consequences of this criteria. He proposed two. The first is that love is found more in deeds than words. Jesus himself said: it is not those who call me Lord, Lord, who talk much, who shall enter the Kingdom of heaven; but those who do the will of God. The invitation set before us, then, is to be concrete by doing the deeds of God.

There is a question we must each ask ourselves: If I abide in Jesus, if I abide in the Lord, if I abide in love, what do I do for God not what do I think or what do I say and what do I do for others?. Therefore, he said the first criteria is to love with deeds, not with words. The wind carries away our words: today they are here and tomorrow they are gone.

The second criteria for concreteness, the Pope continued, is that in love it is more important to give than to receive. The person who loves, gives, gives things, gives life, gives himself to God and to others. Instead, the person who does not love and who is selfish always seeks to receive. He seeks always to have things, to have the advantage. Hence the spiritual counsel to abide with an open heart, and not like the disciples whose hearts were closed and who therefore did not understand. Pope Francis repeated: it is a matter of abiding in God and of God abiding in us. It is a matter of abiding in love.

The sole criteria of abiding in our faith in Jesus Christ the Word of God made flesh is the very mystery that we celebrate in this season. And he reaffirmed that the two practical consequences of this Christian concreteness, of this criteria, are that love is found more in deeds than words, and that in love it is more important to give than to receive.

As we gaze on the Child in these final three days of the Christmas Season, Pope Francis concluded, let us renew our faith in Jesus Christ, who is true God and true Man. And let us ask for the grace to be granted this concreteness of Christian love so that we might always abide in love and that he might abide in us.