



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

When God cries

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Pope Francis spoke on the theme of fatherhood in his homily at the Mass he celebrated. Commenting on the Readings of the day, the Pope connected the theme of fatherhood to the two main figures described in the passage from Mark's Gospel (5:21-43) and the second Book of Samuel (18:9-10; 14:24-25,30; 19:1-4): Jairus, one of the synagogue's leaders during the time of Jesus, "who goes to ask for his daughter to be restored to health", and David, "who suffers over the war raised by his son". The Pope said that these two events show how every father "receives a kind of unction from his child: he cannot understand himself without his son".

The Pope first focused on the king of Israel, recalling that even though his son Absalom had become his enemy, David "waited for news of the war. He sat between the two gates of the palace and watched". Everyone thought that he was waiting for "news of a great victory", but instead "he was waiting for something else: he was waiting for his child. He was concerned for his child. He was king, he was the leader of the country", but first and foremost "he was a father". And so "when the news came of his son's death", David "was shaken by a tremor, went up to the floor above the door and cried: "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

This, the Pope said, "is the heart of a father who never disowns his son", even if "he is a thief or an enemy", he cries for him. The Pope then pointed out how David weeps for his children on two

occasion in Scripture: on this occasion and that of when death was coming to the son who had been conceived in adultery: in that instance too he fasted and did penance in order to save his son's life", because "he was his father".

Returning to the Gospel passage of the day, the Holy Father shed light on another element of the scene: silence. "The soldiers have returned from battle to the city in silence", he said, whereas when David was young and returned to the city after killing the Philistine, women came out from their homes "to praise him, rejoicing; this is how soldiers returned after a victory". Instead, on the occasion of Absalom's death, "victory was not visible, because the king was crying". More than David was "a king and a victor", he was "a grieving father".

As for the figure in the Gospel passage, the leader of the synagogue, Pope Francis said that he was an "important person", but that "when faced with his daughter's illness" he was not ashamed to throw himself at Jesus' feet and beg him: "My daughter is dying, come and lay your hands upon her that she might be saved and live!". The man does not reflect on the consequences of what he is doing. He does not stop to wonder whether Christ "is a sorcerer rather than a prophet", and he risks appearing as a fool. Being a father, the Pope explained, "he does not reflect, he risks, he throws himself before Jesus and pleads". In this scene the figures enter the house to find crying and screaming. "There were people shouting loudly because that was their job: their job was to go and cry in the homes of the dead". But theirs "were not the cries of a father".

The Pope then made a connection between the two father figures. Their priorities were their children. This "brings to mind the first thing we say about God in the Creed: 'I believe in God the Father'. It brings to mind God's paternity, that this is how God is with us". Some might say: "But father, God does not cry!". Pope Francis said that he would respond to this by saying: "But of course he does! We remember how Jesus cried as he looked at Jerusalem: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I wished to gather your children!', as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings". Therefore "God does cry; Jesus wept for us". And in his weeping we see the cries of a father, "who wants everyone to be with him in times of difficulty".

The Pope also recalled how in the Bible there are at least "two unpleasant instances in which the father responds" to the cries of his child. The first is the story of Isaac, who is led by Abraham to his death, to be a burnt offering. Abraham realizes that "he was bringing the wood and the fire, but not the sheep for the sacrifice". And so "he had anguish in his heart. And what did he say? 'Father'. To which immediately came the reply: 'I am here, son'". The second instance was that of "Jesus in the Garden of Olives. With anguish in his heart he said: 'Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me'. And the angels came to give it strength. This is how our God is: he is a father".

The image of David, sitting there between the two gates of the palace, awaiting the news, brings to mind a parable in Chapter 15 of St Luke's Gospel, the parable of the father awaiting the prodigal son who had "fled with all of his money, all of his inheritance. And yet still the father waited for

him?” the Pope asked. Scripture tells us that “he saw him from afar, because he had been waiting every day” for his son to return. In that merciful father, we see “our God”, who “is our father”. From this springs the hope that the fathers of families and spiritual father, religious, priests, and bishops, can increasingly be like the two characters in the Readings: “the two men, who are fathers”.

In conclusion, the Pope invited everyone to meditate on these two “images”: David who wept and the leader of the synagogue who without shame or fear of ridicule threw himself before Jesus, because “his child was at stake”. The Holy Father asked the faithful to renew their profession of faith, saying “I believe in God the Father”. He said that we should ask the Holy Spirit to teach us how to say “Abba, Father”, because “it is a grace to call God ‘Father’ from the heart”.