



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Judas and the lost sheep

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(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

The “happy announcement of Christmas” is not only that “the Lord comes with his power”, but that power is in “his caresses”, his “tenderness”. It is a tenderness which, like the good shepherd with his sheep, is shown to each one of us: God never forgets any of us, not even if we are tragically “lost”, like Judas who, having become lost within his “interior darkness”, is in some ways a prototype, the “symbol” of the little sheep of Gospel parable.

In the homily for Mass celebrated Tuesday, 6 December at Santa Marta, Pope Francis entered into the heart of this “happy announcement” in light of the call to “sincere exaltation” found in the day’s liturgy. “Before Christmas”, the Pontiff said, “we ask for the grace to receive this happy announcement with sincere exaltation and rejoicing”, but also “to allow the Lord to console us”. Asking why the liturgy also speaks about consolation, the Pope explained that “the Lord comes, and when the Lord comes he touches the soul with these feelings”. Indeed, “he comes as a judge, yes, but a judge who caresses, a judge who is full of tenderness”, and “does everything to save us”. God “judges with love, so much, so much, so much, that he sent his Son, and as John stresses: not to judge but to save, not to condemn but to save”. This is because “the justice of God always brings us this hope of being saved”.

Delving deeper into the meditation, the Pope referenced the day’s Gospel (Mt 18:12-14) which speaks about the Good Shepherd. This judge “who caresses” and who comes “to save”, Francis

said, has “behaviour of the pastor: What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray?”. Even the Lord, when he comes, “does not say: “But, I counted and lost one, ninety-nine... it’s reasonable...’. No, no. One is unique.” The shepherd in fact does not simply possess ninety-nine sheep, but “has one, one, one, one, one...”: in other words, “each one is different”. He “loves each one personally. He does not love an undifferentiated herd. No! He loves us by name; he loves us as we are”.

Continuing along this line, the Pontiff explained that the shepherd “knew well” the lost sheep; she did not get lost, but “knew the journey well”: she was lost “because she had a missing heart, had a sick heart. She was blinded by something interior and, blurred by that interior disassociation, fled into the darkness to let off steam”. However, this “was not a prank that she had done . . . She ran away: an escape properly to distance herself from the Lord, to satisfy that interior darkness which led her to a double life”, to “being in the flock and escaping from the darkness, in the darkness”. Thus is the consoling message: “The Lord knows these things, and he went to look for her”.

At this point that Pope Francis introduced another element into his reflection: “For me, the figure which makes me best understand the Lord’s attitude with the lost sheep is the attitude of the Lord with Judas. The most perfect lost sheep in the Gospel is Judas”. Indeed, the Pontiff recalled, he is “a man who always, always had something of a bitterness in his heart, something of criticizing the others, always at a distance: a man who did not know the “gracious sweetness of living with others”. Therefore, because this “sheep” “was not satisfied”, he “escaped”.

Judas, the Pope said, “escaped because he was a thief. Others “are lustful”, and similarly “escape because there is that darkness in their heart which distances them from the flock”. We are confronted with “that double life” which exists “in many Christians”, and even in “priests” and “bishops”, the Pope said “with pain”. Even “Judas was a bishop. He was one of the first bishops...”.

Therefore, Judas too is a “lost sheep”, Francis said, adding: “Poor man! Poor man, this brother Judas, as he was called by Don Mazzolari, in that very beautiful sermon: Brother Judas, what happened in your heart?”.

It deals with a reality which is not foreign even to Christians. This is because “even we are able to understand the lost sheep”. Indeed, the Pope stressed, “we too always have a little something, little or not so little, of the lost sheep”. We must therefore understand that “it is not a mistake which the lost sheep committed: it is an illness, it is an illness which he had in his heart”, one of which the devil took advantage. The Pontiff went on to recall Judas’s final moments: “when he went to the temple to have a double life”, when he gave “the kiss to the Lord on the cheek”, and then “the money he received from the priests”. He said: “it was not a mistake. He did it... He was in darkness! He had a divided, disassociated heart. ‘Judas, Judas...’”. It is for this reason that we can say he “is the symbol of the lost sheep”.

Jesus, “the shepherd, goes to look for him: ‘Do what you must do, friend’, and kissed him”. However, Judas “did not understand”. In the end, when he realized “that which a double life has done in the community, the evil which he has sewn, with his interior darkness, which always leads to escape, seeking lights which are not the life of the Lord”, but instead “artificial lights”, like the “Christmas decorations”, when he understands all of this, “he is hopeless”. This is what happens when “the lost sheep do not accept the caresses of the Lord”.

The Pope delved deeper into this reflection, saying that “the Lord is good, even for these sheep”, and never stops going to look for them”. This is shown with a single word found in the Gospel, “a word which says that Judas is hanged, hanged and ‘regretful’”. He noted: “I believe that the Lord will take that word and carry it with him, I don’t know, maybe, but that word makes us doubt”. Above all, he stressed: “But what does that word mean? That until the end, God’s love worked in that soul, until the moment of despair”. This is “the behaviour of the good pastor with the lost sheep”. I

It is the “happy announcement which brings us to Christmas, and which asks for this sincere exaltation which changes our heart, which leads us to let ourselves to be consoled by the Lord, and not by consolations which we go out to look in order to vent, to escape from reality, to escape from interior torture, from interior division”. The “happy announcement”, the “sincere exaltation”, the “consolation”, the “rejoicing in the Lord” springs from the fact that “the Lord comes with his power. And what is the power of the Lord? The caresses of the Lord!”. He is like the Good Shepherd who, “when he has found the lost sheep, he did not insult him, no”. Instead, he said: “But you have done great harm? Come, come...”. Likewise, “in the garden of olives”, what did he say to the “lost sheep”, Judas? He called him “friend. Always caresses”.

Following this point, the Pope stressed: “Whoever does not know the caresses of the Lord does not know Christian Doctrine. Whoever does not allow him or herself to be caressed by the Lord is lost”. It is precisely “this happy announcement, this is the sincere exaltation which we want today. This is the joy, this is the consolation which we seek: that the Lord may come with his power, which are the his caresses, to find us, to save us, like the lost sheep, and to bring us into the flock of the Church”.

Francis concluded his homily with a prayer: “That the Lord may give us this grace, to wait for Christmas with our wounds, with our sins, sincerely recognizing, waiting for the power of this God who comes to console us, who comes with power, but his power is the tenderness, the caresses which are born from his heart, his very good heart which has given life to us”.