



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

When God visits

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With his witness, a Christian must show others the same attitudes with which God visits his people: closeness, compassion, the capacity to restore hope. Pope Francis affirmed this during Mass at Santa Marta.

“God has visited his people” is an expression which is “repeated in the Scripture”, the Pontiff noted. He immediately referred to the narrative in the Gospel of Luke, which tells of the resurrection of the widow’s son in Nain (7:11-17). They are words, he stated, which have “special meaning”, different from that of such expressions as “God has spoken to his people” or “God has given the Commandments to his people” or even “God has sent a prophet to his people”.

In the statement “God has visited his people”, the Pope said, “there is something extra, something new”. This phrase can be found in the Scripture; it is written, for example, “God visited [Naomi] in her old age and made her a grandmother”. And likewise, the Pontiff added, Scripture “tells of Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin: God visited her and made her a mother”.

So “when God visits his people, it means that he is present in a special way”. And, Francis highlighted, recalling the event in Nain, “in this Gospel passage, where it describes the

resurrection of the young man, the son of the widowed mother, the people speak these words: ‘God has visited us’.

Why use this exact expression? Is it only because Jesus “performed a miracle?”, the Pontiff asked. In reality, there is “more”. In fact the key issue is to understand “how God visits”.

The Bishop of Rome indicated that God visits “first of all with his presence, with his closeness”. In the passage from the day’s liturgy “it is written that Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him”. In essence, “he was close to the people: a close God who is able to understand the heart of the people, the heart of his people”. Then, Luke recounts, “he sees that procession and he draws near”. Thus “God visits his people”, he is “in the midst of his people he draws near”. Hence, “closeness is God’s way”.

Additionally, the Pope observed, “there is an expression repeated many times in the Bible: “The Lord was moved by great compassion”. And it is that “same compassion which, the Gospel says, he had when he saw so many people like sheep without a shepherd”. So it is a fact that “when God visits his people he is close to them, he draws near and feels compassion: he is moved”. He is “deeply moved, as he was in front of Lazarus’ tomb”. He is moved like the father in the parable, when he sees the prodigal son return home.

Closeness and compassion: this is how the Lord visits his people”, Francis remarked. And “when we want to proclaim the Gospel, to spread the Word of Jesus, this is the way”. However, “the other way is that of the teachers, the preachers of that time: the doctors of the law, the scribes, the Pharisees”. Characters “far removed from the people”, who “spoke well, taught the law well”. But they were also “distant”. And their way “was not a visit from the Lord: it was something else”. Such that “the people did not feel this as a grace, because it lacked closeness, it lacked compassion and suffering with the people”.

Adding to “closeness” and “compassion”, the Pope proposed “another word which is characteristic of the Lord’s visit to his people”. Luke writes: “And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother”. Thus “when God visits his people, he restores hope to the people. Always!”.

In this regard, Francis pointed out that “one can preach the Word of God brilliantly” and “there have been many great preachers: but if these preachers do not manage to sow hope, their preaching is useless. It is in vain”.

This very image proposed by the Gospel of Luke, the Pope said, can bring a full understanding to “what is meant by God’s visit to his people”. We understand “by seeing Jesus in the midst of that great crowd; by seeing Jesus draw close to that funeral procession and the crying mother, and he tells her ‘Do not weep’, and perhaps he caresses her; by seeing Jesus give the mother back her

son, alive". In this way, the Pontiff concluded, we can "ask for the grace that our Christian witness may be the bearer of God's visit to his people, that is, of closeness which sows hope".