
Pope Francis at audience: “Those who live in a large city risk losing the capacity to contemplate”

“Those who live in a large city, where everything – we can say – is artificial and where everything is functional, risk losing the capacity to contemplate”, the Pope said in the catechesis of today’s general audience live streamed from the Private Library of the Apostolic Palace, devoted to contemplative prayer. Francis cited the first Pastoral Letter of Carlo Maria Martini when he served as bishop of Milan, titled “The contemplative dimension of life.” *“The contemplative dimension of the human being – which is not yet contemplative prayer – is a bit like the ‘salt’ of life”*, Francis said in the opening lines: “it gives flavour, it seasons our day. We can contemplate by gazing at the sun that rises in the morning, or at the trees that deck themselves out in spring green; we can contemplate by listening to music or to the sounds of the birds, reading a book, gazing at a work of art or at that masterpiece that is the human face.”

“To contemplate is not primarily a way of doing, but a way of being”,

Francis remarked: “being contemplatives does not depend on the eyes, but on the heart. And here prayer enters into play as an act of faith and love, as the ‘breath’ of our relationship with God. Prayer purifies the heart and, with it, also sharpens our gaze, allowing it to grasp reality from another point of view.” “This transformation of the heart that prayer effects”, Francis continued, citing a famous testimony of the Holy Curé of Ars, “I look at him and he looks at me. The light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. Everything comes from this: from a heart that feels that it is looked on with love. Then reality is contemplated with different eyes.”

“I look at Him and He looks at me!”

It is the essence of contemplative prayer, whereby, as in loving contemplation, *“does not need many words. A gaze is enough. It is enough to be convinced that our life is surrounded by an immense and faithful love that nothing can ever separate us from.”* **“Jesus was a master of this gaze”**, Francis reminded the faithful: “His life never lacked the time, space, silence, the loving communion that allows one’s existence not to be devastated by the inevitable trials, but to maintain beauty intact. His secret is his relationship with his heavenly Father.” As in the Transfiguration, when Jesus climbs up a high mountain with Peter, James and John. “Right at the moment in which Jesus is not understood – they were going away from him, they were leaving him alone because they did not understand – just when everything seems to become blurred in a whirlwind of misunderstanding, that is where a divine light shines”, Francis said: “It is the light of the Father’s love that fills the Son’s heart and transfigures his entire Person.”

“Jesus Christ, in his person and the Gospel, there is no opposition between contemplation and action”,

the Pope pointed out. “Some spiritual masters of the past understood contemplation as opposed to action, and exalted those vocations that flee from the world and its problems to dedicate oneself entirely to prayer”, noted His Holiness, explaining that the opposition between contemplation and action “may have come from the influence of some Neoplatonic philosophy that creates this opposition, but it surely contains a dualism that is not part of the Christian message.” “There is only one great call, one great call in the Gospel, and it is that of following Jesus on the way of love”, the Pope remarked: “This is the summit and it is the centre of everything. In this sense, charity and

contemplation are synonymous, they say the same thing.” *“Saint John of the Cross believed that a small act of pure love is more useful to the Church than all the other works combined”, “What is born of prayer and not from the presumption of our ego, what is purified by humility, even if it is a hidden and silent act of love, is the greatest miracle that a Christian can perform”,* the Pope said in his closing lines: “this is the path of contemplative prayer: I look at Him and He looks at me. It is that act of love in silent dialogue with Jesus that does so much good for the Church.”

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