

POPE FRANCIS

The Gospel of Matthew

A Spiritual and Pastoral Reading

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Introduction

THE WORD IS FULFILLED TODAY

This book does not represent a systematic exegetical reading of the Gospel of Matthew or a progressive *lectio divina* of passages from the Gospel; rather, it represents a broad, reflective meditation by Francis—Jesuit, superior, pastor, bishop and, today, pope—based on the scriptures; not developed organically, but woven together from fragments, words spoken or written by Francis at various times. His thoughts are arranged here according to the succession of the chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. Together these reflections form a commentary in which the Word resounds sometimes as a light that illuminates circumstances of personal, ecclesial, and social life and at other times as an invitation to go out and “walk through courtyards and see grasslands, looking at fragments but contemplating forms”—yet always as an echo of the voice of the Divine Master, who today speaks to his people and to each person. No one is excluded, believer or non-believer, good or bad; all are called to announce the fulfillment of the Word in his person.

The purpose of this book is to help those who, both for personal enrichment and deeper understanding, read and meditate on the Gospel of Matthew. It is meant to draw them closer to Jesus and to discover the hidden treasure in the

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words of the Gospel, words that can make the heart burn again today.

These pages are not intended for study, or necessarily for preaching, but simply for letting ourselves be guided by Francis, a master of prayerful silence, to enter into a simple and living intimacy with him who is the Word “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), the Word made flesh.

Noticeable throughout the selection of reflections is the familiarity of Pope Francis with the Word and hence his untiring concern to announce it as “the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt 13:52). Perhaps all this can be summed up in what the apostle John, advanced in years, wrote: “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:3–4).

The “Word” thus takes on a double meaning or dimension: the eternal Word incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Word contained in scripture. Perhaps each may seem separate in meaning; in reality, they are like two sides of the same coin that refer to each other in a continuous dynamic that can be understood as “Word in abeyance” waiting to become “Word accomplished”—“Word that becomes flesh.”

The Word Is Mercy Made Flesh

From the mouth of Jesus, almost like a refrain, we often hear the expression of mercy: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13; 17:7). He is the One who not only reveals the mercy of God, not only announces the coming of the time of mercy, but also implements it in many ways, in many gestures, and in many encounters. The love of the Father “has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus’s entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something en-

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tirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially with regard to sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion."¹ "In Christ, the Father pours forth his boundless mercy even to making him 'mercy incarnate.'"²

The Word Resounds and Is Fulfilled

The Word of scripture is presented as a great story of the relations between God and humanity, a history of encounters, clashes, and escapes. When we read this story today, when we hear it, when we celebrate it, it is no longer something of the past, an archaeological residue. Rather, it lives on in our present: it is the word of God, the word of the Lord, it is a new event. We are no longer strangers, but we are involved participants and actors in this story. In fact, we read in the prophet Isaiah: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10–11). In summary: the Word resounds and is fulfilled today. It is from this perspective that we reflect on the Gospel of Matthew and the various reflections of Francis.

—*Translated from the original introduction by Gianfranco Venturi*