



(ZENIT, Vatican City, September 7, 2016) We have to be careful about what concept of God we conjure up, says Pope Francis, or else we won't be able to find the real God when he reveals himself.

The Pope offered this reflection today during the general audience, when he gave a catechesis on Matthew 11:2-6. This passage recounts the story of John the Baptist sending his disciples to Jesus – John was in prison – to ask Him a very straightforward question: Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

The Pope explained, "It was precisely in the moment of darkness ... The Baptist anxiously awaited the Messiah, and in his preaching he had described Him with strong language, as a judge that would finally establish the Kingdom of God and purify His people, rewarding the good and punishing the evil. He preached thus: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (*Matthew 3:10*). Now that Jesus has begun His public mission with a different style, John suffers because he finds himself in twofold darkness: in the darkness of the prison and of a cell, and in the darkness of the heart. He does not understand Jesus' style and wants to know if He is in fact the Messiah, or if he must wait for another."

Jesus' answer, though, is not as straightforward as John's question.

Jesus "answers that He is the concrete instrument of the mercy of the Father, who goes out to all bringing consolation and salvation, and in this way manifests the judgment of God," the Pope noted.

John's uncertainties "only anticipate the disconcert that Jesus would arouse afterwards with His actions and His words," the Holy Father said.

And in this context, Jesus' conclusion becomes clear: "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me" (v. 6).

False images

The Bishop of Rome went on to say that Jesus' admonition is "always timely."

"Today also man constructs images of God that impede him from enjoying His real presence," he said.

The Pope went on to list five of these false images:

— Some cut out for themselves a "do it yourself" faith that reduces God to the limited space of their desires and convictions. But this faith is not a conversion to the Lord who reveals Himself, rather it impedes Him from challenging our life and our conscience.

— Others reduce God to a false idol; they use His holy name to justify their own interests or even hatred and violence.

— Still for others God is only a psychological refuge in which to be reassured in difficult moments: it is a faith that is inward-looking, impermeable to the force of the merciful love of Jesus that drives one to our brothers.

— Others, again, consider Christ only as a good master of ethical teachings, one among the many of history.

— Finally, there are those that suffocate the faith in a purely intimist relation with Jesus, annulling His missionary impetus capable of transforming the world and history.

Pope Francis exclaimed that in contrast to all of this, "Christians believe in the God of Jesus Christ, and our desire is that of growing in the vivid experience of the mystery of love."

"Therefore, let us commit ourselves not to put an obstacle to the Father's merciful action," he concluded, "but let us ask for the gift of a great faith so that we too become signs and instruments of mercy."