

The Pope's reflections came from the day's gospel reading that recounted how the apostles were terrified when they saw Jesus walking on water. And the reason for their terror, he explained, is that their hearts were hardened.

"Mirror" men and women and religious narcissists

Pope Francis said a person's heart can be made of stone for many reasons, such as, for example, a painful experience in one's life. But as he went on to point out, another reason for hardened hearts is because people are closed in on themselves.

"Creating a world within one self, all closed in. Closed within oneself, in one's community or parish, but always closed in. And this closure can revolve around so many things. But let's think about pride, self-sufficiency, thinking I am better than others, and vanity too, right? There are 'mirror-men and women' (who are wedded to their own image in the mirror), who are closed in on themselves and are constantly looking at themselves, right? These religious narcissists, right? But they have a hardened heart because they are closed in on themselves, they are not open. And they seek to defend themselves with these walls that they have created around themselves."

Hardened hearts because of insecurity and fear

The Pope said these hardened hearts in people can also arise from a problem of insecurity, such as those who barricade themselves behind the laws and rules, as though inside a prison, to feel safer and follow these rules to the letter,

"When a heart becomes hardened, it's not free and if it's not free it's because that person isn't capable of love, that was the fate of the Apostle John in the first Reading. A love that's perfect banishes fear: in love there's no fear, because fear is expecting a punishment and a person who's afraid doesn't have a perfect love. He or she is not free. They are constantly afraid that something painful or sad will occur, that will cause their life to go badly or will endanger their eternal salvation... What an (over-active) imagination, because he or she can't love. A person who isn't capable of loving is not free. And their heart was hardened because they hadn't learnt how to love."

The Spirit makes us free and docile not yoga or zen courses

Pope Francis concluded his homily by stressing that only the Holy Spirit can teach us how to love and free us from our hardened hearts.

“You can follow a thousand catechism courses, a thousand spirituality courses, a thousand yoga or zen courses and all these things. But none of this will be able to give you the freedom as a child (of God). Only the Holy Spirit can prompt your heart to say ‘Father.’ Only the Holy Spirit is capable of banishing, of breaking that hardness of heart and making it ... soft? No, I don’t like that word, ... ‘docile’. Docile towards the Lord. Docile when it comes to the freedom to love.”