



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Fleeing from God

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(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 41, 9 October 2013)

To hear the voice of God in one's life, one needs to open his heart to surprise. Otherwise, one can start "fleeing from God". In fact, it happens that Christians sometimes run away from God, while people who are "far away" are able to hear him. This was the focus of the homily Pope Francis delivered on Monday morning, 7 October at Santa Marta.

The Bishop of Rome used the story of Jonah as a paradigm in commenting on the first reading (1:1-16; 2:2-11): "he had his entire life in order; he served the Lord, perhaps he even prayed a great deal. He was a prophet, a good man and he did much good". Yet "he didn't want to be disturbed in the way of life he had chosen; when he heard the word of God he sought to escape. And he fled from God". Therefore, when "the Lord sent him to Ninevah, he boarded a ship to Spain. He was fleeing from the Lord".

In the end, the Pontiff explained, Jonah had already written his own story: "I want to be like this, this and this, according to the commandments". He did not want to be disturbed. This is why he fled from God. The Pope warned that we, too, can be tempted to flee. "We can run away from God," he said, "as a Christian, as a Catholic," and even "as a priest, bishop or Pope". We can all flee from God. This is a daily temptation: not to listen to God, not to hear his voice, not to hear his

promptings, his invitation in our hearts”.

Although “we may make a direct getaway,” he also noted that “there are also more subtle and sophisticated ways of fleeing from God”. The reference was to the Gospel passage from St Luke (10:25-37) which tells of “a certain man, half dead, who had been thrown into the street”. The Pope continued, referencing the scriptures, “Now by chance a priest was going down that road. A good priest, in his cassock: good, very good. He saw him and looked: I'll be late for Mass, and he went on his way. He didn't hear the voice of God there”. It was, the Pope explained, “different from Jonah's escape, Jonah was clearly fleeing. Then a Levite passed by, he saw [the man half dead] and perhaps he thought: If I take care of him or go close to him, perhaps he is dead and tomorrow I'll have to go to the judge to give testimony, and so he passed by on the other side. He was fleeing from the voice of God in that man”.

It is curious to note that only a man “who habitually fled from God, a sinner”, the Samaritan, was the very one who “perceived the voice of God”. He “drew near” to the man. “He bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast. Oh how much time he lost: he brought him to an inn, and took care of him. He lost the whole evening!”. In the meantime, the Bishop of Rome noted, “the priest arrived in time for the Holy Mass and all the faithful were content. The next day, the Levite had a peaceful day and spent it just as he had planned” since he didn't have to go to the judge.

“And why”, the Holy Father asked, “did Jonah flee from God? Why did the priest flee from God? Why did the Levite flee from God?”. Because “their hearts were closed”, he answered. “When your heart is closed you cannot hear the voice of God. Instead, it was a Samaritan on a journey “who saw” the wounded man and “had compassion. His heart was opened, he had a human heart”. His humanity enabled him to draw near.

“Jonah had a plan for his life: he wanted to write his own history well, according to God's ways. But he was the one writing it, the same with the priest, the same with the Levite”. However, “this other sinner allowed God to write the history of his life. He changed all his plans that evening” because the Lord placed before him “this poor, wounded man who had been thrown out onto the street”.

I ask myself — the Pope continued — “and I also ask you: do we allow God to write the history of our lives or do we want to write it? This speaks to us of docility: are we docile to the Word of God? Yes, I want to be docile, but are you able to listen to [his Word], to hear it? Are you able to find the Word of God in the history of each day, or do your ideas so govern you that you do not allow the Lord to surprise you and speak to you?”.

“I am sure,” the Pope concluded, “that all of us today are saying ... the Priest and the Levite were selfish. It's true: the Samaritan, the sinner, did not flee from God!”. And so I ask that the “the Lord grant that we may hear his voice which says to us: Go and do likewise”.

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