



# The Holy See

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**POPE FRANCIS**

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE  
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ*

*"Così fan tutti"*

*Friday, 17 January 2014*

*(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 4, 24 January 2014)*

In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the first Reading from the first Book of Samuel (8:4-7, 10-22). Continuing his reflection on this week's readings, the Pope said: "We saw how the people distanced themselves from God, they had lost their knowledge of the word of God; they did not listen to it, they did not meditate on it". And he added: "When the word of God is absent, its place is taken by another word: by one's own word, the word of one's egoism, the word of one's desires, and also the word of the world".

"We saw how the people, who were far from God's word, suffered defeat". Distancing oneself from God, the Pope added, leads to taking a path that inevitably "leads to what we heard about today: the people reject God. Not only do they not listen to the word of God but they reject it" and eventually say "we can govern ourselves, we are free and we want to go down this road".

Samuel, he noted, "suffers because of this and goes to the Lord. And the Lord with good sense says to Samuel: 'Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'".

Essentially, the Pope explained, "the Lord lets the people continue to distance themselves from him" and he allows them to "experience" the consequences of their departure. "Samuel tries to convince them and he says all the things we have heard, what the king would do with them, with

their sons, with their daughters”. And yet, despite all these warnings, “the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel” and they asked to have “a king as judge”.

Pope Francis noted that here we come to “the interpretative key” to understanding the decisive issue. The people respond to Samuel: “We also will be like all the nations”. And so they demand: give us “a king who ‘may judge us’, like the rest of the peoples”.

Their request, the Pope said, was motivated by the fact that they had “forgotten that they were a chosen people, a people of the Lord, a people chosen in love and led forth by the hand” as “a father leads his child”. They “forgot this love” and desired to become like the other peoples.

This desire, Pope Francis explained, “will return as a temptation in the history of the chosen people. We remember the time of Maccabees, when they negotiated their status as a chosen people in order to be like all the other nations. It is a true insurrection. The people rebel against the Lord”. And this, he said, “is the door that opens to worldliness: to doing as everyone does” and not “as you who have chosen me have told me to do”. As a consequence, “they reject the Lord of love, they reject their election, and they seek the path of worldliness”.

Of course, the Pope explained, “it is true that a Christian should be normal, as people are normal. The *Letter to Diognetus* stated this in the early days of the Church. However, there are values that a Christian cannot adopt for himself” for “he must keep before him the word of God which tells him: you are my son, you are chosen, I am with you, I walk with you” and “normalcy of life demands a Christian’s faithfulness to his election”. His must never “sell it off to move towards a worldly kind of uniformity: this was the people’s temptation and it is also ours”.

Pope Francis therefore warned those present against forgetting “the word of God, and what the Lord tells us”, in order to chase after “the word that’s in style”. Such an attitude would lead us to say “the word of the soap operas is in style! Let’s take it: it’s more entertaining!”. This attitude of worldliness, he said “is more subtle and dangerous than the sin of ‘apostasy’, i.e., the sin of breaking with the Lord, since we more readily see the latter for what it is.

To say that “we want to be like all the other nations” also reveals that Israel “felt a certain inferiority complex for not being a normal people”. This led them to say: “We know how we should be, the Lord can stay peacefully at home”. Ultimately, this way of thinking is rooted in the first sin, in giving into the temptation to decide for oneself what is good and what is evil.

“Temptation hardens the heart”, the Pope said. “And when the heart is hardened, when the heart is not open, the word of God cannot enter. It is not by chance that Jesus spoke the words he did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: ‘O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe’, because their hearts were hardened and so they could not hear the word of God”.

“Worldliness softens the heart,” but in such a way that it “harms it”, he added. “A soft heart is never good. What is good is a heart opened to the word of God, a heart that receives it. Like Our Lady who pondered all these things in her heart, the Gospel says”.

Pope Francis suggested to those present that we ask the Lord for the grace “to overcome our egoism” and for the “grace of spiritual docility, i.e., to open one’s heart to the word of God” in order “not to do as our brothers did who closed their hearts because they distanced themselves from God and for a long time had not listened to or understood God's word”. Then he concluded, saying: “may the Lord give us the grace of a heart open to receive God’s word”, in order to “meditate upon it always” and “to take the truth path”.