



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

We must decrease that he might increase

Friday, 9 May 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 20, 16 May 2014)

Pope Francis reflected on the holiness of the saints in light of the day's Readings from the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-20) and the Gospel of John (6:52-59). The saints, he said, are not heroes and heroines, but rather men and women who live the cross in daily life; they are persons chosen by God to testify clearly to the truth that the Church is holy even though she is made up of sinners.

"The Church is holy". Yet how, the Pope asked, can the Church be holy if we who are sinners belong to her? "We are sinners, but the Church is holy, she is the bride of Jesus Christ, and he loves her, he sanctifies her: he sanctifies her each day through his Eucharistic Sacrifice because he loves her so much", the Pope said. "We are sinners, but in a Church that is holy".

By "belonging to the Church we, too, are sanctified: we are children of the Church, and Mother Church sanctifies us with her love, with the Sacraments of her Spouse". Indeed, the Bishop of Rome continued, "this is our daily sanctification, this is the sanctification of all of us. So much so that in the Acts of the Apostles, when Christians are spoken of, they are referred to as 'saints'". Even St Paul "speaks to the saints: to us, who are sinners but who are children of holy Church, sanctified by the Body and Blood of Jesus, as we just heard in the Gospel".

"In this holy Church the Lord chooses some people to manifest her holiness more clearly, to show forth that it is he who sanctifies; that no one sanctifies himself; that there is no course for

becoming a saint; that to be a saint is not a matter of acting like a fakir". Instead, "holiness is Jesus' gift to his Church; and to show this, he chooses people" in whom "his work of sanctification is clearly seen".

In this regard, the day's liturgy presents us with the "sanctification of Saul, of Paul" (cf. Acts 9:1-20). This is not an isolated case, the Pope said, for the Gospel contains so many models of holiness. "There is Mary Magdalene: in the Gospel, St Mark says that Jesus had cast out of her seven demons"; thus "he did he sanctify her; she went from being the worst to holiness!". Then "there is Matthew, who was a traitor to his people and took their money in order to give it to the Romans"; but "the Lord took him from his shop" brought him along with him. And again, "there is Zaccheus, who wanted to see Jesus; and he calls him — 'come with me, come!' — and he sanctifies him"

"But why has the Lord chosen these people throughout the Church's history", the Pope asked. For "there are many saints, recognized saints of the Church". The Lord chooses these people to give clear testimony to the first rule of holiness: Christ must increase and we must decrease. In short, sanctity requires "our humiliation so that the Lord might increase".

Thus, the Lord "chooses Saul, an enemy of the Church", as the Acts of the Apostles recounts. Saul, who still breathing forth threats against the disciples of the Lord, "went to the high priests and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem".

These are strong words, the Pope said, and they show how much Saul hated and persecuted the Church: a hatred, he added, that "we saw" also "in the stoning of Stephen" at which Saul also presided.

Seized by this hatred, Saul "goes to request authorization" to persecute the Christians. "Yet the Lord waits for him: he waits for him to make him feel his power", the Pope observed. Saul "is blinded and obeys" when, on his way to Damascus, the Lord tells him: "rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do". Thus, Saul goes from being "a man who had everything clear, who knew just what he had to do against this sect of Christians, to becoming like a young boy who obeys: he rises, goes and waits". However, Saul "doesn't wait with cellphone in hand" saying: "But come ... what do I have to do... but tell me... but I've already been waiting two days...". Instead, "he waits as he does: praying and fasting. His heart was changed".

The account from Acts then introduces the disciple Ananias, who baptizes Paul. Once he was baptized, Paul "rose and took food and then went from synagogue to synagogue announcing that Jesus is the Son of God". His life was completely changed.

The Pope then explained the difference between heroes and saints, by repeating the Lord's words

to Ananias: “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name”.

“The difference between heroes and saints is witness,” the Pope said, “the imitation of Jesus Christ: taking the way of Jesus Christ.... Paul preached the Gospel, was persecuted, beaten, judged and ended his days with a small group of friends in Rome, a victim of his disciples. Thus Paul “deceases, deceases, deceases”, according to the rule of holiness. The Pope also proposed the figure of John the Baptist, “the greatest man born of woman, who ends his days in prison through the whim of a dancer and the hatred of an adulteress.

“Paul ends in the common manner. Surely three, four or five soldiers went to him in the morning” and ordered him: “Come with us!”. Then “they took him away and cut off his head. That was it”. Thus Paul, “the great [Apostle], the one who had travelled throughout the world, ends his days”, the Pope said. “And this is the difference between heroes and saints: the saint is one who follows Jesus on the path of Jesus, with the cross”.

“So many of the canonized saints in the Church ended so humbly”, Pope Francis said. And he offered the example of Pope St John Paul II as one such saint. “This was the path of holiness of the great ones”. However, he added, “it is also the path of holiness for us”. For, “we will certainly not become saints unless we allow our hearts to be converted along this path of Jesus: by daily carrying the cross, the ordinary cross, the simple cross, and allowing Jesus to grow. If we do not take this road we will not be saints, but if we do travel this path we will bear witness to Jesus Christ, who loves us. And we will bear witness that, while we are sinners, the Church is holy, she is Jesus’ bride”.

Pope Francis concluded: “today perhaps it will do us good, at Mass, to feel this joy: Jesus’ sacrifice here on the altar sanctifies us all, it makes us grow in holiness, it makes us become more authentic children of his bride, the Church, our Mother who is holy”.