



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Why boast about sins

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“Of what things can a Christian boast? Two things: his sins and Christ Crucified”. Only one thing really counts: the encounter with Christ which changes the life of “tepid” Christians and transforms the face of “decadent” parishes and communities. This was Pope Francis’ indication at morning Mass.

The Pontiff spoke mainly about the liturgy’s first reading from the First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (3:18-23). The Pope explained that “in these verses that we have read during recent liturgies”, Paul “speaks of the strength of the Word of God”. Moreover, it can be said that Paul “does theology with the Word of God”. And the Apostle concluded with this reflection: “Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God”.

Basically, the Pontiff stated, “Paul tells us that the strength of God’s Word, which changes the heart, which changes the world, which gives us hope, which gives us life, does not lie in human wisdom”. Thus “it is not in speaking well and in saying things with human intelligence. No, that is folly”. Rather, “the strength of God’s Word comes from another place”. Of course “it also passes through a preacher’s heart”. And this is why Paul advises all those who preach the Word of God:

“Become fools”. He admonished them not to search for security “in the knowledge of the world”. And thus the Apostle continues, “let no one boast of men”.

At this point one must wonder “where Paul’s security is, where his security is rooted”. The Pope then pointed out that Paul “had studied with the most knowledgeable teachers of his time”, yet he never boasted. Rather “he boasted of only two things, and these things that Paul boasted of are precisely the place where the Word of God can come and be strong”. Indeed, he said of himself: “I boast only of my sins”. These were “scandalous words”, the Pontiff said, adding that “in another verse he says: I boast only of Christ and of this Crucifix”. Thus “the strength of God’s Word is in that encounter between my sins and the blood of Christ who saves me. And when there is no such encounter, there is no strength in the heart”. And when we forget that encounter, Pope Francis said, “we become worldly, we want to speak about the matters of God with human language, and this useless” because “it is not life giving”.

Thus “the encounter between my sins and Christ” is crucial. And this, Francis noted, is what happens when, in the reading from the Gospel according to Luke (5:1-11), Jesus tells Simon to “put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch”. Peter responded to him: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets”. And, the Pope continued, this is how “that miraculous catch” happened.

In the face of this event, “what does Peter think?”, asked the Bishop of Rome. He does not react with satisfaction for the catch he hadn’t hoped for, nor for what he would earn from it, the Pope explained. He “only sees Christ, he sees his strength and he sees himself”. Therefore he kneels at Jesus’ feet saying: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”.

For Peter “this encounter with Jesus Christ”, becomes the encounter between his sins and the strength of the Lord who saves. In that situation, the Pontiff highlighted, “the sign of salvation was the miracle of the catch; the privileged place for the encounter with Jesus Christ is one’s sins”.

Pope Francis continued, “if a Christian is incapable of feeling himself a sinner and saved by the blood of Christ Crucified, he is a half-way Christian, he is a tepid Christian”. And “when we find decadent churches, when we find decadent parishes, decadent institutions, certainly the Christians who are there have never encountered Jesus Christ, or they have forgotten that encounter with Jesus Christ”.

“The strength of the Christian life and the strength of the Word of God lie precisely in that moment where I, sinner, encounter Jesus Christ”, the Pope explained. “And that encounter turns life inside-out; it is life changing. And it gives you the strength to proclaim salvation to others”.

Paul’s words and Luke’s Gospel propose “so many questions” to believers. The Pontiff indicated that one should ask oneself: “Am I capable of saying to the Lord: ‘I am a sinner’?”. The question is

not theoretical but practical, because the examination of conscience is concerned, above all, with the capacity to recognize “concrete sin”. The Pope then proposed other questions to ask oneself: “Am I capable of believing that He, with his blood, has saved me from sin and has given me new life? Do I trust in Christ? Do I boast of the cross of Christ? Do I also boast of my sins, in this sense?”.

In this regard, Pope Francis advised going back to the moment of the “encounter with Jesus Christ”, to ascertain that it has not been forgotten, by asking oneself: “Have I encountered Jesus Christ: Have I felt his strength?”. These are fundamental questions, he concluded, because “when a Christian forgets this encounter he loses his strength: he is tepid, incapable of giving to others, with strength, the Word of God”.