



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

New wine, new wineskins

Friday, 5 September 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 37, 12 September 2014)

Do not have fear of making changes according to the law of the Gospel: “The Church asks all of us for a few changes. She asks us to leave aside fleeting structures; they aren’t necessary”. Instead leave room for the “Law of the Beatitudes”, for “joy” and for the “freedom which leads us to the newness of the Gospel”. These were the words of Pope Francis at morning Mass.

The Pope drew upon the reading from the Gospel of Luke (5:33-39) from the day’s liturgy. “These scribes, these Pharisees wanted to put Jesus in difficulty, they wanted to trap him”. Reminding him that John and his disciples fasted, they ask him: “You are such friends with John and your disciples are friends, who seem to be just, why don’t you do the same”? To which “Jesus replies, speaking of two things: he speaks to us of a feast and he speaks to us of newness”.

The Pontiff explained that Jesus primarily “tells us about a feast, a wedding feast, and he says: but we are in a time of feast! There is something new here, there is a feast! Something has fallen and something is renewed, made new”. And it is “curious”, the Pope pointed out, that Jesus “at the end uses the image of wine” such that “when this verse is read it is impossible not to connect this wedding feast to the new wine of Cana”. Basically, “everything is a symbol” which speaks of newness”; above all when Jesus says: “no one puts new wine into old wineskins”. Thus “for new

wine, new wineskins". This "is the newness of the Gospel". Francis then asked, "what does the Gospel bring us? Joy and newness".

However, he continued, "these doctors of the law were locked up in their commandments, in their rules". So much that "St Paul, speaking about them, tells us that before faith came — that is, Jesus — we were all held as prisoners under the law". But this law was not cruel: "held but as prisoners, waiting for faith to come". Indeed, "that faith which would be revealed in Jesus himself".

The Pope affirmed that the people had the law that Moses had given. And then so many of these customs and little laws that the experts and theologians had decreed". Thus "the law held them, but as prisoners. And they were waiting for freedom, for the definitive freedom that God would give to his people through his Son".

The Pope recalled that St Paul tells us, "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem". And "the newness of the Gospel is this: it is for redemption from the law". In this regard the Pontiff observed: "One of you may tell me: but father, don't Christians have laws? Yes! Jesus said: I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it". And the "fullness of the law, for example are the Beatitudes, the law of love, total love, as He, Jesus, has loved us".

Thus, the Bishop of Rome continued, "when Jesus reproaches these people, these doctors of the law, he admonishes them for not having safeguarded the people with the law" but for having made them "slaves of so many little laws, of so many little things that they had to do". And to have done it "without the freedom that he brings us with the new law, the law that he had sanctioned with his blood".

This then "is the newness of the Gospel, which is a feast, it is joy, it is freedom". It is "that very redemption that the whole of mankind were waiting for when they were held by the law, but as prisoners". And this is also "what Jesus meant to tell us: what do we do, Jesus, now?". The answer is: "To what is new, newness; to new wine, new wineskins". For this reason, the Pope explained, one need not "have fear of making changes according to the law of the Gospel, which is a law of faith". St Paul "makes a good distinction: sons of law and sons of faith. To new wine, new wineskins". This is why "the Church asks us, all of us, for a few changes. She asks us to leave aside fleeting structures; they aren't necessary! And get new wineskins, those of the Gospel".

Pope Francis then pointed out that "it is not possible to understand the mentality, for example, of these doctors of the law, these Pharisee theologians, with the spirit of the Gospel. They are different things". In fact, "the Gospel's approach is a different approach, which leads to the fulfillment of the law". But "in a new way: it is the new wine in new wineskins".

To the question posed by those Pharisees and scribes, the Pope observed, Jesus basically responded: “We cannot fast as you do during a feast. Days will come when the bridegroom is taken away”. And saying this “he was thinking of his passion, he was thinking of the times of the passion of so many Christians, where there will be a cross”.

The fact remains, however, that “the Gospel is newness, the Gospel is a feast. And one can fully live the Gospel only in a joyous heart and in a renewed heart”. In this perspective the Pope asked the Lord for “the grace of this observance of the law: to observe the law — the law which Jesus brought to fulfillment — in the commandment of love, in the commandments which come through the Beatitudes: those commandments of the renewed law of the newness of the Gospel”. May the Lord, Pope Francis concluded, “give us the grace of not being prisoners, but may he give us the grace of joy and of the freedom which brings us the newness of the Gospel”.