



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Am I alive inside?

Tuesday, 18 November 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 47, 21 November 2014)

“The Word of God can change everything” but we “don’t always have the courage to believe” in it. During the Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, Pope Francis spoke about the “three calls to conversion” from the day’s liturgy, explaining that “converting is not an act of will”; one doesn’t think: “I’ll convert now, it’s convenient...”, or “I have to do it”. No, conversion “is a grace”; it’s “a visit from God: it’s the Son of Man who has come to seek and to save”; it’s Jesus “who knocks at our door, at our heart, and says: ‘Come’”.

What then, are these three calls? The first is found in the Book of Revelation (3:1-6, 14-22), where the Lord calls the Christians to convert because they have become “lukewarm”. The Pontiff explained that “Christianity, the spirituality of convenience: is neither too much nor too little”. It is the attitude of those who say: “Don’t worry... I’ll do what I can, I’m at peace, and I don’t want to be bothered with anything out of the ordinary”. This is the case of those who feel comfortable and say: “I need nothing. I go to Mass on Sundays, I pray a few times, I feel fine, I’m ‘in God’s grace’, I’m rich, I’m enriched with grace, I don’t need anything, I’m fine”.

This frame of mind, Francis emphasized, “is a state of sin: spiritual convenience is a state of sin”. And indeed, we read in Revelation: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”. The Lord does not mince

words with “these comfortable Christians”, to whom “He says everything to their face”. We also read in the Scripture: “because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth”. This expression, the Pope noted, is “very harsh”. At the same time, in order to help the Christians to convert, the Lord counsels them to clothe themselves, because “the comfortable Christians are naked”. After a harsh word, the Lord then “draws a little closer and speaks with tenderness: ‘so be zealous and repent’”. This, the Pontiff said, is “the call to conversion: ‘I’m at the door and I’m knocking’”. Thus, the Lord turns to the “faction of the comfortable, of the lukewarm” and calls them to “convert from spiritual comfort, from this state of mediocrity”.

There is then a second call: and this one is for those who “live for appearances”. It is again Revelation which speaks of them: “you have the name of being alive, and you are dead”. The Lord says to those who think they are alive, thanks only to appearance: “Awake”, please, and “strengthen what remains and is on the point of death”. Again, there is something living, strengthen it. And He adds tender advice: “Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief”. The Pope emphasized three words — “remember”, “keep” and “awake” —, imagining that this kind of man would think: “I appear to be Christian, but I’m dead inside”. Appearances, Pope Francis said, “are the shroud of these Christians: they are dead”. So the Lord “calls them to repent: ‘Remember, be awake and go forward. There is still something alive in you: strengthen it’”.

Thus, we are all called to ask ourselves: “Am I one of these Christians of appearances? Am I alive inside, do I have a spiritual life? Do I hear the Holy Spirit”. Do I listen to Him? The government should beware of the temptation to say: “if all appears well, I have nothing to be blamed for: I have a good family, people cannot speak ill of me; I have all the necessities, I was married in Church... I’m in God’s grace’, I’m at peace”. Look out, because “Christians of appearance... are dead”. It is necessary, however, “to look for something alive inside and to strengthen it, by remembering and waking, so that it can go forward”. It is necessary “to convert: from appearances to reality. From warmth to zeal”.

Finally, there is the third call to conversion, that of Zacchaeus. Who was he? “He was a chief tax collector, and rich”. He was a “corrupt man” who “worked for foreigners, for the Romans, he betrayed his homeland. He sought money in customs tariffs” and gave “part to the enemy of his homeland”. In other words, he was “like so many leaders we know: corrupt”; people who, “instead of serving the people”, exploit them “in order to serve themselves”. Pope Francis indicated that Zacchaeus “wasn’t lukewarm; he wasn’t dead. He was in a state of putrefaction. Completely corrupt”. Yet in front of Christ, “he feels something inside”. He feels that “this healer, this prophet who they say speaks so well, I would like to see him, out of curiosity”. Here we see the action of the Spirit: “the Holy Spirit is clever and has sown the seed of curiosity”; and in order to see Jesus, that man even did something “a little ridiculous”: a leader, a “chief executive”, actually climbed a tree “in order to watch a procession”. How ridiculous “to behave this way”. Yet he did, and “he wasn’t ashamed”. He was thinking, “I want to see him”.

Inside this self-assured man, the Pope explained, “the Holy Spirit was at work”. And then it happened: “the Word of God entered that heart”, with the Word, with joy. In fact, men who lived in “comfort” and men “of appearance had forgotten what joy was”; while “this corrupt man received it straight away”.

The Gospel of Luke recounts that he “climbed down in haste and received Him joyfully”: that is, he received “the Word of God, which was Jesus”. And what happened “straight away” to Zacchaeus is what had happened to Matthew (who was in the same profession): “the heart changed, he converted, and he gave his sincere word: ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold’”. This, according to Francis, is an illuminating passage: “this is a golden rule. When conversion reaches your pockets, it’s certain”. He explained: “Christians at heart? Everyone. Christians in mind? Everyone”. But, Pope Francis asked, how many are Christians when it comes to “our pockets? Few”. Yet, conversion arrives “straight away” before the “sincere word”. By comparison, there is “the other word”, that of those who don’t want to convert: “when they saw it, they all murmured, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner’. He has become soiled, he has lost purity. He must purify himself because he has entered the house of a sinner”.

In conclusion, these are the three calls to conversion made “by Jesus himself”: “to the lukewarm, the comfortable”, and to those who are Christians in “appearance, those who believe they are rich but are poor”, indeed, “they have nothing, they are dead” and last, to those “beyond death”: the corrupt. Before them, “the Word of God can change everything. But the truth is we do not always have the courage to believe in the Word of God”, to receive that “Word which heals us inside” and by which “the Lord knocks at the door of our heart”.

This, Pope Francis concluded, is conversion, which “the Church wants us to think very seriously about in these final weeks of the liturgical year” in order that “we may go forward on the path of our Christian life”. For this we must “remember the Word of God”, we must “safeguard it”, “obey it” and “awake”, in order to begin a “new, converted life”.