



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Founded on rock

Thursday, 4 December 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 50, 12 December 2014)

Francis warned in his homily on Thursday that “so many good people” give in to the temptation to be Christians “only in appearance”, wearing “makeup” that washes away with the rain. He also spoke again of the witness of so many “Christians of substance”, who build their life on the “rock of Jesus” and live every day with “hidden holiness”.

In the day’s Readings, one a passage from the book of Isaiah (26:1-6) and another from the Gospel of Matthew (7:21, 24-27), the Church “speaks of Christian strength and weakness; of rock and sand”, Pope Francis began. Indeed, “a Christian is strong when he not only declares himself Christian, but when he lives his life as a Christian, when he puts the Christian doctrine, the Word of God, the Commandments, the Beatitudes, into practice”. The key point is “putting into practice”.

However, the Pope remarked, there are those who are “Christians only in appearance: people who make themselves up as Christians, but in the moment of truth they have only makeup”. And we all know what happens when a woman, all made up, gets caught in the rain without an umbrella: “it all comes off, appearances wind up on the ground”. That makeup, Francis acknowledged, “is a temptation”. Thus, it isn’t enough to say, “I’m a Christian, Lord”, in order to truly be one. Jesus himself says that it doesn’t suffice to simply repeat, “Lord! Lord!”, in order to enter his kingdom. We

must do the Father's will and put his "Word into practice". This is the difference between "a Christian in life" and a Christian "in appearance" only.

After all, the Pontiff explained, it's clear that "the Lord is needed". First of all, "a Christian in life is founded on rock". In fact, Paul clearly says so when "he speaks about the water from the rock in the desert: the rock was Christ, the rock is Christ". Therefore, the only thing that counts is "being founded on the person of Jesus, following Jesus, on the path of Jesus". Francis shared that he has so often met "not bad people" but people who are "good, but who are victims of this 'Christianity of appearances'". They are people who say, "I'm from a very Catholic family" or "I'm a member of that association and also a benefactor of that other one". However, according to the Pope, the real question to ask these people is: "is your life founded on Jesus? Where is your hope? In this rock or in these appearances?"

This is the importance of "being founded on rock". After all, "we have seen so many Christians of appearances that wash away with the first temptation, that is, with the rain". Indeed, "when the rivers overflow, when the winds blow — life's temptations and trials — a Christian of appearances falls, because there is no substance there, there is no rock, there is no Christ". On the other hand, however, "we have so many saints" among the People of God, Pope Francis stated, who are "not necessarily canonized, but saints! So many men and women who lead their life in Christ, who put the Commandments into practice, who put Jesus' love into practice. So many!"

The Pope recalled their testimony. "Let's consider the smallest: the sick who offer their suffering for the Church, for others". And then, "let's consider the many lonely elderly people who pray and offer. Let's consider the many mothers and fathers" who work so hard for "their family, their children's education, daily work, problems, always with hope in Jesus" and "they don't strut about, but rather they do what they can".

Truly, Francis repeated, "there are saints in everyday life". He then spoke of "the many priests" who stay behind the scenes "but who work with such love in their parishes: catechesis for the children, care for the elderly and the sick, preparation for newlyweds. And every day it's the same, the same, the same. They don't tire because the rock is their foundation". Only those who live in "Jesus: this is what gives holiness to the Church; this is what gives hope". This is why, the Pope continued, "we have to take great care of the hidden holiness that there is in the Church, that of Christians not of appearances but founded on rock, on Jesus". Look to those "Christians who follow Jesus' advice at the Last Supper: 'Abide in me'". Yes, to the "Christians who abide in Christ", because, certainly, we are all sinners", but when "any of these Christians commit a grave sin" they repent, they ask forgiveness: this is great". It means having "the capacity to ask for forgiveness; not confusing sin with virtue; knowing well where virtue is and where sin is". We also understand from this that these Christians are "founded on rock, and the rock is Christ: they follow the path of Jesus, they follow Him".

In the First Reading, the Pontiff explained, Isaiah “speaks of a strong city that has salvation, that follows God, that is righteous: a strong people. The city is a people. A strong people. Their will is steadfast and God assures them of peace: peace for those who trust in Him”. Then he then added: “Trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height”. In other words, Francis said, “the proud, the vain, the Christians of appearances will be brought down, humiliated”. Isaiah has more to say about the “lofty city”: that God “lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust”. And this is precisely the way “the Christians of appearances end up”, Pope Francis said, conjuring up the image from Isaiah: on one hand “the ruins of a city” and then “the other city, the other house, solid, robust because it’s founded on stone”.

The passage from Isaiah led Francis to another reflection. “It made me think of the last two verses of the First Reading”, referring to “this city that has fallen, this vain city, this city that wasn’t founded on the rock of Christ”. In fact, we read that “The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy”. This expression, he said, “smells of punishment”. Yes, “it seems like punishment”, but “it isn’t punishment”.

Something similar is also said “in the song of Our Lady: ‘he has put down the mighty from their thrones, he has humiliated the proud”. Moreover, Pope Francis said, “the poor will be those who triumph, the poor in spirit, those who feel themselves nothing before God, the humble” who “bring forth salvation, but putting the Word of the Lord into practice”. However, Francis repeated, “all the rest is appearance: today we are, tomorrow we won’t be”. The Pope then made reference to St Bernard: “Consider, man, that you will be the food of worms”. Because one day “we will all be eaten by worms” unless “we have this rock, we will end up trampled”.

Precisely in this season of Advent, “let us ask the Lord that we may be firmly founded on the rock that is Him: He is our hope”, the Pope concluded. It’s true, “we are all sinners, we are all weak, but if we place our hope in Him we can all carry on”. And this “is Christian joy: to know that in Him there is hope, there is forgiveness, there is peace, there is joy”. This is why it makes no sense to “put our hope in things” that are here today but gone tomorrow.