



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

We are history

Thursday, 18 December 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 1, 2 January 2015)

In those “bad times” which inevitably arise in life, you must take on problems with courage, placing them in the hands of a God who makes history even through us, and corrects it even though we are unable to understand and we make mistakes. Pope Francis offered this suggestion during the Mass celebrated on Thursday, 18 December, in the chapel of Casa Santa Marta.

In yesterday’s liturgy, we reflected on the genealogy of Jesus, the Pontiff began. And with the morning’s passage from the Gospel of Matthew (1:18-24) this reflection concludes by telling us “that salvation is always in history: there is no salvation without history”. Indeed, to arrive at the point we have reached today, he explained, “there has been a long history, a remarkably long history which, yesterday, the Church symbolically chose to tell us in the Reading of the genealogy of Jesus: God wanted to save us in history”.

“Our salvation, the one God wanted for us, is not an aseptic, manufactured salvation”, but “historical”. And God, Francis affirmed, “made a journey in history with his people”. The First Reading, taken from the Prophet Jeremiah (23:5-8), “says something beautiful about the phases of this history”, the Pope pointed out, rereading the words of the Scripture: “the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt’, but ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of

the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them”.

This was “another step, another phase”, Francis explained. Thus, “history is made step by step: God makes history”, and “we too make history”. And “when we make mistakes, God corrects history and leads us onward, onward, always walking with us”. After all, if this isn’t clear to us, “we will never understand Christmas, we’ll never understand the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, never”. For “it’s all a history of walking”, the Pope commented, and obviously, it doesn’t end with Christmas, because “now, the Lord is still saving us in history and walking with his people”.

Here then, is why we need “the sacraments, prayer, preaching, the first proclamation: in order to continue with this history”. We also need “sins, for they aren’t lacking in the history of Israel”: in Jesus’ own genealogy “there were many considerable sinners”. Yet “Jesus went forward. God goes forward, despite our sins”.

However in this history “there are a few bad moments”, Francis noted: “bad times, dark times, troublesome times” which bring problems “for the chosen ones, for those people whom God chooses to guide history, to help his people move forward”. The Pope recalled “Abraham, a calm 90-year-old, with his wife: he had no son, but a beautiful family”. However, “one day the Lord disturbed him” and commanded him to leave his land and set out on a journey”. Abraham “was 90 years old” and that was definitely “a troublesome time” for him. But this is how it was for Moses too, “after he fled from Egypt: he married, and his father-in-law had a huge flock, and he shepherded that flock”. He was 80 years old and “he was thinking about his sons, about the inheritance he would leave them, about his wife”. And then the Lord commanded him to return to Egypt to free his people. However, “that time was uncomfortable for him there, in the land of Midian. But the Lord bothers” and it’s useless for Moses to ask “But who am I to do this?”.

So, Francis said, “the Lord bothers us in order to make history, He makes us go so many times on the path that we don’t want”. And he then recalled the story of Elijah: “the Lord impels him to kill all the false prophets of Baal and then, when the queen threatens him, he’s afraid of a woman”; but “that man who killed 400 prophets, is afraid of a woman and could die of fear, he doesn’t want to continue moving”. It was truly “a bad moment” for him.

In the passage from the Gospel of Matthew, the Pontiff continued, “today we’ve read of another bad time in the history of salvation: there are so many of them”. In the day’s Reading, the main character is “Joseph, betrothed: he really loves his bride-to-be, and she goes to help her cousin. And when she comes back the first signs of pregnancy can be seen”. Joseph “suffers, he sees the women of the village gossiping at the market”. And suffering, he says to himself about Mary: “This woman is good, I know her! She is a woman of God. What has she done to me? It isn’t possible! But I have to accuse her and she will be stoned. They will say all sorts of things about her. But I can’t lay this weight on her, about something I don’t understand, because she isn’t capable of infidelity”.

Therefore, Joseph decides to “take the problem upon his shoulders and leave”. And “this is what the ‘gossipmongers’ at the market will say: ‘look, he left her with child, and then ran away so he wouldn’t have to take responsibility’”. Joseph instead “prefers to look like a sinner, like a bad man, in order to avoid casting a shadow on his betrothed, whom he really loves”, even though “he doesn’t understand”.

Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Joseph, God’s chosen ones, make history in their difficult times, by “taking the problem upon their shoulders, without understanding”. The Pope continued, returning to the story of Moses, “when, on the shore, he saw Pharaoh’s army approaching: the army over there, the sea over here”. He might have said: “What do I do? You misled me, Lord!”. But then he takes the problem upon himself and says: “Either I go back and negotiate or fight and be defeated, or I kill myself and trust in the Lord”. Facing these alternatives, Moses chooses the second and “the Lord makes history”, through Moses and “in moments just like this, like a bottleneck”, the Pontiff described.

The Pope then referred back to the story of another Joseph, “the son of Jacob: out of jealousy, his brothers wanted to kill him, then they sold him, he became a slave”. And from this story the Pope highlighted the suffering of Joseph, who also had “that problem with the administrator’s wife, but he doesn’t accuse the woman. He is a noble man: because it would destroy the poor administrator to know the woman was unfaithful”. And so Joseph “shuts his mouth, takes the problem on his shoulders and goes to jail”. But “the Lord goes to free him”.

Returning to the Gospel, the Pontiff again highlighted that “Joseph, in the worst time of his life, in the darkest moment, takes the problem upon himself”, up to himself being accused “in the eyes of the others in order to cover his bride”.

And, Pope Francis noted, “perhaps some psychoanalyst” would say this is “compressed anguish” trying to get out. But, he added, “they say what they want!”. In reality Joseph took his bride with him, saying: “I don’t understand a thing, but the Lord told me this, and this one is going to appear as my son!”.

That is why “for God, making history with his people means walking and putting his chosen ones to the test”. Indeed, “in general, his chosen ones went through dark, painful, bad times, like these that we have seen”; but “in the end the Lord comes”. The Gospel, the Pope recalled, tells us that He “sends the angel”. And “this is — let’s not say it’s the end, because history continues — precisely the moment before: one history before Jesus’ birth; then comes another history”.

In consideration of these reflections, Francis recommended: “Let us always remember to say, with trust, even in the worst of times, even in moments of illness, when we realize that we have to ask for extreme unction because there is no way out: ‘Lord, history did not begin with me nor will it end with me. You go on, I’m ready’. And thus we place ourselves “in the hands of the Lord”.

This is the attitude of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Joseph, and also of so many other chosen people of God: “God walks with us, God makes history, God puts us to the test, God saves us in the most difficult moments, because He is our Father”. Indeed, “according to Paul, He’s our dad”. Francis ended his homily with a prayer “that the Lord enable us to understand this mystery of his journey with his people in history, of his testing his chosen ones who take upon themselves their suffering, the problems, even appearing as sinners — let’s think of Jesus — in order to carry on with history”.