



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Wealth and poverty

Tuesday, 16 June 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 25, 19 June 2015)

The focus of Pope Francis' homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday was the "theology of poverty". The Pontiff's reflection began from the passage of the Second Letter to the Corinthians (8:1-9), in which St Paul "is organizing, in the Church of Corinth, a collection for the Church of Jerusalem, which is experiencing difficult times of poverty". To prevent the collection from being done in a wrongful way, the Apostle offers "several considerations", a sort of "theology of poverty". These clarifications were necessary because, Francis explained, "poverty" is a word "which is always embarrassing". Indeed, how often have we heard: "This priest talks too much about poverty, this bishop speaks of poverty, this Christian, this nun speaks of poverty.... They are rather communistic, no?". But instead, the Pope underscored, "poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel", such that "if we were to remove poverty from the Gospel, nothing would be understood of Jesus' message".

Thus, St Paul explains the catechesis "on charity and on poverty and on wealth", beginning with an example taken from the experience of the Church of Macedonia. There, "in a severe test of affliction — for they suffered greatly through persecutions — their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part". In other words, "in giving, in enduring afflictions, they were enriched, they became joyous". And, Francis added, it is found in

one of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when they insult you, when they persecute you ...”.

After giving this example, Paul turns back to the Church of Corinth: “as you are rich, think of them, of the Church of Jerusalem”. But, the Pope asked, of which richness is Paul speaking? The answer immediately follows in the text: “you excel in everything: in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness”, and in the love that we taught you. This is followed by an exhortation: “Now, as you excel, see that you excel in this gracious work also”. In other words, Francis explained, act in order that your “great wealth — zeal, charity, the Word of God, the knowledge of God — reaches the pocket”. Because, he added, “when the faith doesn’t reach the pocket, it is not a genuine faith”; and this is “a golden rule” to remember.

Thus, from the Pauline passage emerges a “juxtaposition between wealth and poverty. The Church of Jerusalem is poor, she is in financial difficulty, but is rich because she has the treasure of the Gospel message”. And it is “this poor Church of Jerusalem”, which enriched the Church of Corinth “with the Gospel message: they gave her the treasure of the Gospel”. Those who are financially wealthy are poor in reality, “without the Gospel message”. There is, said the Pontiff, “a mutual exchange” and thus, “from poverty comes wealth”.

It is at this point, the Pope explained, that “Paul, with his thoughts, reaches the bedrock of what we can call ‘the theology of poverty’ and why poverty is at the heart of the Gospel”. The Epistle reads: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”. Thus, “it was the very Word of God made flesh, the Word of God in this condescendence, in this humbling himself, in this impoverishing himself, for us, to make us rich in the gifts of salvation, of the word, of grace”. This “is the very core of the theology of poverty”, which, after all, is seen again in the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. Francis emphasized: “being poor is allowing yourself to be enriched by the poverty of Christ and not wanting a wealth of other treasures which are not those of Christ, it is doing what Christ did”. It is not only becoming poor, but is going “even a step further”, because, he said, “the poor enrich me”.

Turning to the concrete nature of everyday life, the Pope explained that “when we give help to the poor, we do not do acts of charity in a Christian manner”. This is a “good” act, a “human” act, but “this is not the Christian poverty that Paul wants, that Paul preaches”. Because Christian poverty means “that I give of my own and not from excess”, even from my basic necessities, “to the poor, for I know that they enrich me”. And why do the poor enrich me? “Because Jesus said that he himself is in the poor”.

Paul alludes to the same concept when he writes: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”. This happens “each time I strip myself of something, but not only of the excess, to give to a poor person, to a poor community, to so many poor people who lack everything”, because “the poor enrich me”

insomuch as “it is Jesus who acts in him”.

This is because, Francis concluded, poverty “is not an ideology”. Poverty “is at the heart of the Gospel”. In the “theology of poverty” we find “the mystery of Christ who lowered himself, humbled himself, impoverished himself, to enrich us”. Thus it is understood “why the first of the Beatitudes is: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’”. And “being poor in spirit”, the Pontiff continued, means “going on this path of the Lord”, who “so humbled himself” as to become “bread for us” in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Jesus “continuously lowers himself in the history of the Church, in the memorial of his passion, in the memorial of his humiliation, in the memorial of his lowering, in the memorial of his poverty, and of this ‘bread’, he enriches us”.

The Pope then prayed: “That the Lord enable us to understand the path of Christian poverty and the attitude that we must have when we help the poor”.