



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Paul's advice

Tuesday, 1st September 2015

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Two icons, the testimony of Job and Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgement*, can restore our certainty in the personal encounter with the Lord. To each of us, the Pope offered the advice that Paul gives to the Christians of Thessalonica, to "comfort one another" and "to speak about the coming of the Lord", which is all that counts. In addition, don't waste time chatting in the sacristy. During morning Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 1 September, Francis also suggested a series of questions for an examination of conscience on how we are living our lives as we await the Lord.

The Holy Father began his meditation by examining a passage from the First Letter which "the Apostle Paul writes to the community of Thessalonica" (5:1-6, 9-11), taken from the liturgy of the day. The Pope noted that perhaps "this letter is the first that he writes". He addresses it to "a somewhat troubled community", one that is preoccupied about the "how and when" of the Lord's return. Thus, in the passage offered the previous day, Francis said, St Paul is compelled to tell them not to "grieve as others do who have no hope". Indeed, the community is asking: "What happens to the dead, where do the dead go?". And even: "When will the Lord come?". And some answer: "He is coming now! And since he is coming now, let us not work!".

Thus Paul, a "practical" man, addresses the Thessalonian Christians with strong words: "one who

does not work does not eat". Thus, the Pope stated, the Apostle "has to teach the path of peace" to this community. In the previous day's Reading too, Paul admonishes them not to "grieve because the Lord will come and your dead are with him". But he then says something more: "and so we shall always be with the Lord". This affirmation, said Francis, "is a great comfort". Indeed, it "is what awaits us, all of us". What's more, he added, "yesterday's passage ended with advice: 'Therefore comfort one another with these words'".

But "today too", the Pope said, "the passage we read ends with the same teaching: comfort one another". It is indeed "comfort that gives hope: the Lord will come, and he will come when he wants to come, when he sees that the time has come". No one can say when it will be: Paul even writes that the Lord "will come like a thief in the night, as travail comes upon a woman with child: he comes!". From this perspective "what must we do?". Paul offers this advice: "Comfort one another, encourage one another". In other words, he tells them to talk about it together. "But I ask you", Francis continued, "do we talk about the fact that the Lord will come, that we will meet him?". Or "do we talk about many things, even theology, matters of the Church, of priests, nuns, Monsignors, all this?". And he added, "is this hope our comfort?".

Paul's advice is to comfort one another, encourage one another in community. On this question Francis proposed an examination of conscience: "in our communities, in our parishes, do we talk about the fact that we are awaiting the Lord who is coming, or do we chat about this, that or the other, to pass a bit of time and not become too bored? What is my comfort? Is it this hope? Am I certain that the Lord will come to find me and take me with him? Am I certain of this?".

Pope Francis then repeated the words of the Responsorial Psalm 27[26]: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". And right away he asked another question: "Do you believe that you will see the Lord?". To consider this Francis referred to the "beautiful ending of Chapter 19 of the Book of Job", and explained that "Job suffers greatly", yet "amid his pain, his wounds, his misunderstandings, the suffering of not understanding why this has happened to him, he says: I am certain, I know that my Redeemer lives; I know that God lives and I shall see him, that with my eyes I shall behold him".

This witness challenges each one of us. Thus the Pope proposed a direct reflection: "Do I believe this? Or is it better not to think? Do we think about something else, because this certainty that the Lord will come to find me, to take me with him.... This is our peace, this is our comfort, this is our hope".

"It's true, he will come to judge", Francis added. "And when we go to the Sistine Chapel, we see that beautiful scene of the *Last Judgement*: it's true!". But "let us also think that he will come to find me so that I may see him with my own eyes, embrace him and always be with him. This is the hope that the Apostle Peter tells us to explain to others to bear witness to hope by our life". Thus, this is the true comfort: "I believe — this is true certainty — that I shall see the goodness of the

Lord. This is why, the Pope continued, returning to Paul's counsel, "encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. And this is how we go forward". After all, precisely "in the opening prayer of the Mass", he recalled, "we asked the Lord to nurture the seedling that he planted in us, that seed of goodness, that seed of grace".

Francis followed the homily by asking "the Lord for the grace that the seed of hope which he planted in our heart may continue to grow until the final meeting with him", that we may say: "I believe that I shall see the Lord"; "I know that the Lord lives"; "I know that the Lord shall come to find me". This is "the horizon of our life". Therefore, the Pontiff concluded, "let us ask the Lord for this grace and comfort one another with good works and good words, on this path".