



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The risk of hypocrisy

Friday, 11 September 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 38, 18 September 2015)

“If you were to find a person who has never, never, ever spoken ill of another, he could be canonized immediately”. Francis used this statement to warn against the temptation of always pointing a hypocritical finger at others. Instead, he recommended having “the courage to take the first step” by recognizing our own errors and weaknesses, and acknowledging our faults. It is the spiritual advice, centred on forgiveness and mercy, which the Pontiff offered during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning. Because, he admonished, “hypocrisy” is a risk run by “everyone, starting with the Pope, on down”.

“In recent days”, his homily began, “the Liturgy has made us reflect many times on peace, on the work of peacemaking and reconciling that Jesus did, and also on our duty to do the same”. In other words, “to make peace, to make reconciliation”. Furthermore, the Pope continued, “the Liturgy has also made us reflect on the Christian way, especially on two words, words that Jesus put into action: forgiveness and mercy”. But, said Francis, “we too must do so”.

Therefore, he continued, “in these days, the Liturgy has led us to consider this, to reflect on this path of mercy, of forgiveness, of the Christian way with the sentiments of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience”. The Christian way, in fact, consists in “forbearing one

another". It is an attitude that "leads to love, to forgiveness, to patience", because "the Christian way is patience. It is great".

"The Lord", the Pontiff explained, "told us that along with this great spirit, there is also something else: generosity, the generosity of forgiveness, the generosity of mercy". And "it spurs us to be like this, generous, and to give: to give all we have, from our heart; to give love above all". In this respect, he added, "he speaks to us about the 'reward': judge not and you shall not be judged; condemn not and you shall not be condemned".

This, therefore, Francis affirmed, "is the Lord's summation: forgive and you shall be forgiven; give and you shall receive". But "what will you receive? A good, brimming, abundant, overflowing amount", the Pope said, "will be deposited within your bosom, because your journey shall be measured according to the standard by which you judge". That is to say, "if you have a great deal of love, mercy, generosity, you will be judged accordingly".

Thus, the Pontiff pointed out "the summation of the thoughts of the Liturgies of recent days". "All of us", he continued, "could say: 'This is beautiful, eh! But Father, it's beautiful but how does one do it? How does one begin? What is the first step to get onto this path?'".

The Pope responded that by looking to the Liturgy itself, we see this "first step, both in the First Reading and in the Gospel". He explained that "the first step is acknowledging our faults, the courage to acknowledge our own faults, before blaming others". The Apostle Paul, in the First Letter to Timothy (1:1-2, 12-14), "praises the Lord for having chosen him, and gives thanks "because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him". This, Francis explained, "was mercy". Paul "tells what he himself was, a blasphemer, but one who blasphemed was condemned to stoning, to death". Thus Paul "persecuted Jesus Christ, insulted him, was a man who did not have peace in his soul nor did he make peace with others". And today, "Paul teaches us to acknowledge our faults".

In the passage from the Gospel according to Luke (6:39-42) "the Lord, with the image of the speck that is in your brother's eye and of the log that is in your own, teaches us the same thing: brother, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye". Therefore, the "first step" is: "acknowledge your faults".

Thus, Francis also suggested an examination of conscience, "when we have thoughts about other people", such as: "Look, this one is like this, that man is that way, that one does this, and this one...". In those very moments it is appropriate to ask yourself: "And what about you, what do you do? What do I do? Am I just? Do I feel like the judge removing the speck from the eyes of others and blaming others?"

In such situations Jesus chooses the word "hypocrite", which, the Pope noted, "he uses only with

those who are two-faced, who have a double spirit: 'hypocrite!'. Men and women who don't learn to acknowledge their faults become hypocrites. Everyone, eh! Everyone! Starting with the Pope, on down: everyone!". In fact, he continued, "if one of us isn't able to acknowledge his faults" and isn't able, when necessary, "to speak to the appropriate person regarding other people's matters, he isn't a Christian, he doesn't take part in this beautiful work of reconciliation, peacemaking, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, and mercy which Jesus Christ brought us".

This is why, the Pontiff affirmed, "if you cannot take this first step, ask the Lord for the grace of conversion". Thus, "the first step is this: am I able to acknowledge my faults? How is it done?". Basically, the answer is "simple, it is a simple exercise". Francis offered this practical advice: "When it occurs to me to think about others' faults, stop" and think about my own. "When I feel the desire to speak about others' faults, stop" and consider my own.

It also takes "a courage like Paul's" in the letter he writes to Timothy: "I blasphemed, and persecuted, and insulted". But, the Pope asked, "how many things could we say about ourselves?". Thus, "let's hold back our comments about others and let's make comments about ourselves". This is how we truly take "the first step on this path of magnanimity". Because one who "is only able to see the speck in another's eye winds up being petty: a petty spirit, full of trivialities, full of idle talk".

Before continuing the celebration, the Pontiff asked "the Lord for the grace — this is also the courage of Paul — to follow Jesus' counsel: to be generous in forgiveness, to be generous in mercy". He explained in conclusion that, "in order to recognize a person as a saint there is a whole process, there must be a miracle, and then the Church proclaims him a saint. But if you were to find a person who has never, never, ever spoken ill of another, he could be canonized immediately. It's beautiful, isn't it?".