



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Spiritual leopards

Thursday, 1st December 2016

(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

Pope Francis pointed out the concrete testimony of Bl. Charles de Foucauld to invite Christians to “follow in his footsteps of poverty, contemplation and service to the poor”. At the conclusion of Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, 1 December, the Pontiff recalled the French priest on the centenary of his execution.

Charles de Foucauld, Francis said, before imparting the blessing, was “a man who overcame many kinds of resistance and bore a witness which did a lot of good for the Church”. Thus, “let us ask him to bless us from heaven and to help us”, he added, in this way making the spread of the Gospel more timely than ever.

The very resistance that Foucauld conquered provided the guiding thread for the Pontiff’s reflection, which also arose from the day’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew (7:21, 24-27). The Pope indicated in particular “three types of hidden resistance”, which are the the most “dangerous”: the resistance of “empty words”, of “justificatory words” and of “accusatory words”.

“In the First Week of Advent”, the Pope stated in his homily, “we always ask the Lord to purify us, to prepare us for the encounter with him”. Today in particular, “in the collect prayer, we prayed in this way: ‘Stir up your power, O Lord, and with mighty strength come to the aid of your faithful; that your grace overcome the resistance of sin and hasten the moment of salvation’”. Thus, Francis

continued, “let us ask the Lord to help us in this journey of encounter, of salvation”. However, we ask for a “grace which has led me to reflect: ‘that your grace overcome the resistance of sin’”.

Indeed, he noted, “in Christian life there are always difficulties and resistance to going forward: there is open resistance, which is born of good will”. Just as Saul, who “resisted grace, but he didn’t know and was convinced he was doing God’s will”. Then “it was Jesus himself who told him: ‘Saul, Saul, calm down, stop’”. For “it is difficult to resist when goaded??”. Thus, “Jesus goes there and Saul confesses and converts”. After all, the Pontiff added, “open resistance is healthy, because we all are sinners” and resistance is “natural, in the sense that [resistance] is open to grace in order to convert”.

However, what is “more dangerous”, he explained, is “hidden resistance”, the kind that lies under the surface, “which doesn’t show itself”. But “we all have it”. Yes, the Pontiff continued, “each one of us has our own style of resistance hidden from grace: we must look for it, find it and set it before the Lord, so that he may purify us”. It is that very “resistance” of which “Stephen accused the doctors of the law: ‘You and your fathers always resist the Holy Spirit’”. In fact, those doctors “showed themselves as if they were seeking the glory of God, but in the background there was resistance to the Holy Spirit”. Of course, making that accusation “cost poor Stephen his life, but he was speaking the truth”.

“This hidden resistance, which we all have”, Francis said again, has a “nature” that is easy to recognize since “it always comes to stop a process of conversion”. And it really is a matter of “stopping” it, it is not simply “fighting against” it. “It is standing still, perhaps smiling, but you do not pass”, as if “resisting passively, secretly”. Indeed, “when there is a process of change in an institution, in a family”, we can recognize “resistance” and it is a good thing, Francis remarked. In fact, were there no resistance, “God would not be: when there is resistance it is the devil who sows it”, to prevent the Lord from moving forward.

The Pope then asked: “what are these hidden types of resistance?”. He suggested several answers, beginning with: “resistance of empty words, those words” the Lord refers to in the Gospel: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven”. One might even say: “Lord, Lord, you know me, we have had supper together...”. And “he repeats it often in the Gospel: ‘No, this man shall not enter!’”. This is why, Francis stated, “words do not serve, words do not help us: just words, empty words”. It is as to say: “Yes, yes, yes”, while underneath we are saying: “No, no, no”. Yet “always ‘yes’, a mild ‘yes’, in order to soften the Lord’s commandment or the Spirit’s voice”.

In this regard, the Pontiff referred to “the parable of the two sons, whom the father sends into the vineyard.”... “One says: ‘No, I won’t go!’”. But “then he thinks: ‘Yes, I’ll go, it’s Dad’”. However, the other son responds: “Yes Dad, be calm, I’ll go”, while instead “he thinks, ‘this old man doesn’t understand new things’, and he doesn’t go”.

So, the Pope said, the second son “puts up passive resistance” which consists in “saying yes, all yes, diplomatically”, when the real answer “is no, no, no”. Therefore, “so many words — ‘yes, yes, we’ll change it all, yes’ — in order to change nothing”. This is precisely the way of the “spiritual leopard”, those who say “absolutely yes”, when in fact “it is absolutely not”. This “is the resistance of empty words”.

“Then there is another kind of resistance”, the Pontiff explained, “that of justificatory words”, which, however, “do not justify us”. This is the case of a person who “constantly justifies himself — ‘no, I did that because this, this and that’ — but when there are many justifications, there is not the good odour of God”, but “the foul odour of the devil”. In reality, Francis continues, “a Christian doesn’t need to justify himself: he has been justified by the Word of God, the only word that justifies us”. Instead, we return to the “no, I did this because...” reasoning that is typical of those who “always have an opposing rationale”. However, “one mustn’t do ‘this’ in order to ‘that’...?? Look at this danger...”. This way “things do not go forward, grace cannot go forward: it is the resistance of words that try to justify my position so as not to abide by what the Lord recommends”.

There is then “a third type of resistance of words: accusatory words”, which serve to “blame others rather than looking to yourself”. The Pope offered the example of the Pharisee in the temple who says: “Thank you Lord, for I am not like the others, nor am I like that man, I am just before you”. This is the attitude of those who “blame others, who blame the poor tax collector”. However, in acting this way, you “resist grace” and, considering yourself just, you do not feel the “need for change, for conversion”.

“Resistance is not only the great historical resistances”, such as “the Maginot Line or all those that we studied”, Francis advised. There is the resistance “in our heart, every day”.

There is “resistance to grace, and that is a good sign, because it indicates that the Lord is working in us”. And “we must drop resistance, so that grace can go forward”. Indeed, “resistance always seeks to turn what’s real into something formal, to hide itself in the formal and with the formality of empty words, justificatory words, accusatory words, and many others, it seeks to stay where it is and not allow the Lord to bring it forward”. Because, the Pope recognized, “it is not always easy, there is always a cross: where the Lord is there will be a cross, either small or large”.

It is “the resistance of the cross, the resistance of the Lord who leads us to redemption”. It is “the resistance of Peter: when, after saying he would be the rock of the Church, Jesus begins to explain that He must suffer, Peter resists. ‘No, Lord, this shall never happen!’”. And Jesus replies to Peter, “to his chosen one, to the first Pope, ‘away, Satan!’”. Yes, because Peter “resisted the grace, he resisted God’s plan for humanity and for each one of us”.

In this perspective the Pontiff recommended that we “not fear when each of us finds there is resistance in his heart”. Of course, the right attitude is “to clearly tell the Lord: ‘Look, Lord, I try to

cover this, to do this to prevent your word from entering”. We should “say this really beautiful phrase: ‘Lord, with your mighty strength come to my aid; may your grace overcome the resistance of sin’”. After all, Francis added, “resistance is always a fruit of the original sin that we bear”. It is good “to have resistance”, while it is bad to “use it as a defence against the Lord’s grace”. Indeed, “having resistance is normal”, the Pope concluded, recommending that we say: “I a sinner, help me Lord!”, and inviting us to use this reflection to prepare for Christmas.