



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The pointing finger

Friday, 16 December 2016

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

The vocation of all Christians is “to be witnesses to Jesus”, to fill their lives with the “gestures” typical of John the Baptist: “pointing to Jesus”. This is the common “mission” of the faithful, Pope Francis explained, during his homily for Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, 16 December.

Following the liturgical journey of the previous three days, the Pope reflected “on John, the last of the prophets, the greatest man born of a woman”, the Pope explored the Gospel reading of John (5: 33-36) which portrays Jesus’ forerunner “as the witness”. Jesus himself spoke clearly: “You sent to John and he has borne witness”. And, this is exactly John’s vocation, the Pope said, “to bear witness”.

The Pope suggested that such a vocation can be understood by looking at concrete examples. In fact, he recalled, Jesus described John as “the lamp”. However, he explained, “he was the lamp, but not the light: the flame pointing towards the light, the lamp pointing towards the light, bears witness to the light. In the same way, Pope Francis noted, John “was the voice”. John “says of himself, ‘I am the voice crying in the wilderness’”. However, he was not the Word. In fact, the Pope stressed, “he was the voice, which bears witness to the Word, points to the Word, the Word of God. He was only the voice”. And in this way, the Baptist “was the preacher of repentance”, saying clearly: “after me one is coming, who is greater and grander than me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. And he will baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit.” Francis then summarized:

“The lamp that points to the light, the voice that points to the Word, the preacher of repentance and baptizer who points to the true baptizer in the Holy Spirit”. The Pope concluded that John “is the provisional and Jesus is the definitive. John is the momentary pointing to the definitive”.

But exactly this provisional state, this “being for”, is “the greatness of John”. A man whose finger is always pointing to another. In fact, in the Gospel we read that “the people wondered if John were not the Messiah. And he responded clearly: ‘I am not’”. And also when the doctors, the leaders of the people, asked him: “But is it you, or must we wait for another”? he always responded: “I am not the One. Another will come”, recalling that one would arrive whose sandals John would not be fit to lace: “I am not the One. Another will baptize you”.

For the Pontiff then, what epitomizes John the Baptist “is his provisional witness, but confident, strong”. He is “the flame that was not to be extinguished by the wind of vanity” and “the voice that was not to be silenced by the power of pride”. The Pope explained that John is “always the one who points to the other and who opens the door to the other testimony, that of the Father. Jesus says today, “the testimony which I have is greater than that of John: that of the Father”. And, the Pontiff added, when in the Gospel we hear “the voice of the Father: ‘This is my Son’”, we must understand that “it was John who opened this door”.

Therefore, John “is great”, because “he always keeps to one side”. Francis explained that the saint is great because “he is humble and chooses the path of humiliation, of effacement, the same road that Jesus will take later”. And in this too, John “offers a great testimony: he introduces this way of self emptying” which Jesus also followed.

John the Baptist’s witness extends also to the physical realm: “to the disciples, his own disciples, once when Jesus was walking by”, he pointed his finger and said, “this is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Him, not me, Him”. And, faced with the persistent questions “of the leaders, the people, the doctors”, John always maintained “It is necessary that He [become greater]; he must increase, but I must decrease” *(Jn 3:30). The Pontiff then said that humility “is the greatness of John”. “He becomes smaller; he annihilates himself, until the end: in the darkness of a cell, in prison, beheaded at the whim of a dancer, the jealousy of an adulterer and the weakness of a drunkard”.

Pope Francis repeated the expression the: “Great John”! Adding that if we were to paint a picture of the Baptist, all we would have to paint is the image of a pointing finger.

Concluding the Homily, the Pope remarked on the fact that many of the bishops, priests, religious and couples present at the Santa Marta chapel were celebrating their 50th anniversaries. He said to them: “It is a beautiful day to ask yourself” whether “your own Christian life has always led the way to Jesus, if Christian life has been full of this gesture: pointing to Jesus”. He concluded by urging the faithful “to be thankful” for all the times that this has been done, but also “to begin

anew". The Pontiff advised that we always begin anew, with what he described as "youthfully aged or aged youth, like good wine"! and always a "step forward to continue being witnesses to Jesus" With the help of John "the great witness".