



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Do not delay conversion

Thursday, 23 February 2017

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Pope Francis' reflection at Santa Marta on Thursday morning focused on the "sin" of those who profess to be Christians and then show their true colours by living a life that is not at all Christian, and the counter-testimony of those who "exploit" and "destroy" the lives of others while pretending to be good Catholics. Commenting on the harsh words used by Jesus in the Gospel, he called on those living a "double life" to convert.

The Pontiff's homily was inspired by Psalm 1, which reads: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night". The Bible, Pope Francis explained, was referring to men who find their "strength" in the Lord, and "who feel little, who know that without the Lord they can do nothing". This man is "blessed by the Lord", the Pope said.

Further on, Pope Francis continued, the Psalm also suggests the "contrast between those who follow the Lord's law and those who are arrogant, evil". This same contrast can be found in the day's Gospel (Mark 9:41-50), he explained. In that passage too, "there are good people and bad people". One can perceive behind Jesus' words "the image of these just people who feel they are

little but whose trust is in the Lord”, Francis said. He pointed out that the word “sin” comes up four times in the passage and that the Lord is “very harsh” in using it. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea”, Jesus says. In fact, the Pontiff explained, for the Lord, sin is the same as destruction, thus Jesus advises that it is better to destroy yourself than to destroy others. “Cut off your hand, cut off your feet, pluck out your eye, throw yourself into the sea”, Francis said, but do not cause the “little ones, that is, the just ones, those who trust in the Lord, who simply believe in the Lord”, to sin.

At this point, the Holy Father asked: “what is Sin?”. The answer, he continued, affects every person’s actual life: “sin is saying one thing and doing another; it is a double life”. He then offered an example, “I am very Catholic, I always go to Mass, I belong to this association and another; but my life is not Christian, I do not pay my employees fairly, I take advantage of people, I play dirty in business, I launder money”. This is a “double life”, he stressed, adding that unfortunately there are “many Catholics who are like this and they cause sin”.

These are clear words which bring each of us to reflect back on our daily lives. “How many times have we heard, in our neighbourhood or elsewhere: ‘better to be an atheist than to be a Catholic like him’; this is sin” which “destroys”, which “wears us down”, Pope Francis said. “This happens every day: just watch the television news or read the newspapers. There are many scandals in newspapers, and there is also great publicity of scandals. And scandals destroy”.

Continuing his explanation, the Pontiff spoke about a recent fact regarding “an important company” that was “on the verge of bankruptcy”. Since the authorities “wanted to avoid a strike which was justified but which would have resolved nothing”, they tried to get in touch with the company’s director. But where was this person while the “company was failing” and people “were not receiving wages for their work?”. This manager, who said he was “a very Catholic man”, was “on a beach in the Middle East having a “winter holiday”. This fact “never made it to the papers”, but “people found out”, he explained. These “are the sins, the double lives” and Jesus asks those who behave like this not to destroy the little ones who believe in him, with their double lives, he said.

Paraphrasing another passage of the Gospel, the Pontiff imagined the moment in which the sinner knocks on Heaven’s door: “It is I, Lord!” — “Don’t you remember? I used to go to Church, I was close to you, I belonged to this and that association, I did this ... do you not recall all my offerings? ‘Yes I remember. The offerings I remember: all of them dirty. You steal them all from the poor. I do not know you”’.

The Holy Father explained that the problem begins from an attitude which is well described in today’s first reading (Sirach 5:1-8): “Do not set your heart on your wealth, nor say ‘I have enough.’ Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart”. Thus,

he continued, a double life “comes from following your heart’s desires, the capital sins which are the wounds of the original sin”. Those who create scandal follow these desires even if they conceal them. Scripture admonishes those who, even while recognizing their errors, nevertheless rely on the fact that “the Lord is patient, he will forget...”. Indeed, Scripture cautions us: “do not delay” conversion.

The Pontiff echoed this invitation to every Christian. “It will be good for each one of us to think about whether there is a double life within us: to appear just, to appear as good believers, good Catholics, but to really be doing something else”, he said. It is a case of trying to understand if our behaviour is that of someone who says, the “Lord will forgive me everything, but I will continue...”, and despite being aware of his mistakes, repeats: “Yes, this is no good. I will convert, but not today. No: tomorrow”. Pope Francis ended by calling for self examination in order to experience conversion in our hearts, beginning by acknowledging that “sin destroys”.