



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Vigilant against worldliness

Friday, 13 October 2017

(by: www.osservatoreromano.va)

Pope Francis warned the faithful about “courteous demons” as he celebrated mass at Santa Marta on Friday 13 October. Such demons are well camouflaged, he said, and with impeccable manners they cunningly suggest temptations and seductions, resulting in “parlour possessions”. The Pope advised the faithful to respond to them with “vigilance”, through “prayer, examination of conscience and acts of charity”, in order to avoid falling into “worldliness” and thus, meriting the adjective, “foolish”, a term Saint Paul uses to describe the Galatians. Francis also extended the invitation to look towards the “crucified Christ” and give up the comfort of being “lukewarm Christians”.

The Pope began his homily by point out that “Jesus, many times in his preaching, cautions us to be vigilant, to hold vigil, and keep watch”. He added that on one occasion, Jesus advised watchfulness, “for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect”. Indeed, “vigilance” should be practiced “in relation to the coming of the Lord”. On other occasions Jesus makes this same recommendation emphasizing the importance of “being prepared”, for example, in the case of the ten maidens; both the prudent ones and those who were imprudent or unprepared”. The former “had everything prepared, even the oil for the lamps”; the latter, however were complaisant, “without a thought to being prepared”.

Thus, Jesus warns: “be vigilant”. He advises “watchfulness, prayer and vigilance”, explained Francis, “in order to avoid temptation”. The Pope then referred to the example of Jesus instructing

his disciples in the garden of Olives. “They fell asleep out of fear” he said. Jesus told them to “watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mt 26:41).

Thus, “many times the Lord asks us to be vigilant” Francis noted, because “a Christian is always holding vigil, on watch, attentive; he is somewhat of a sentry, he must keep attentive”. Yet, “today the Lord surprises us with another kind of vigilance that is not easy to understand but is very common”. Here the Pontiff referred to the day’s passage from the Gospel of Luke (11:15-26).

Retracing this passage, Francis explained that Jesus “casts out a demon and then this discussion arises. Some say that ‘he casts out demons by Beelzebul’, and so on; Jesus defends himself and, in the diatribe, brings them to ridicule”. After finishing this, Jesus tells us “not a parable” but “a truth. When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says: ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. The man who lives there is free. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. The condition of that man before the demon was driven out of his life was better than this one”.

The Holy Father pondered the significance of Jesus’ words and of this event. It is symbolic, he explained. The Lord “takes the figure of those demons in the desert, wandering, suffering. Let us consider that when Jesus casts out these demons – which are called ‘legions’ because there are so many – and they ask to be sent among the swine, because they do not want to roam in the desert”. The Pope specified that “Here it says: ‘he passes through waterless places seeking rest’, and after a while he returns”. But, Francis continued, he is surprised to come home and find it “swept and put in order: that man’s soul is at peace with God”, and the demon “does not enter”. And so the demon goes to find “seven others, more evil than himself”.

“The term ‘more evil’ has great force in this passage” observed the Pontiff. He asks the question of how exactly the demon re-enters his ‘home’. “He enters gently” replies Francis, “he knocks at the door, asks permission to enter, rings the bell, returns politely”.

He continues, “this second time they are courteous demons”, and as such, “the man is unaware of it: they enter stealthily, they begin to be a part of the man’s life, with their ideas and inspirations they even help the man to live better and they enter the man’s life, enter his heart and they begin to change that man from within, but quietly, without making a racket”.

“This way”, explained Francis, “is different from forceful demonic possession; this is more of a ‘parlour’ demonic possession, let’s say”, and “it is what the devil does slowly in our lives in order to change the criteria, to lead us to worldliness: he camouflages himself in our manner of behaviour and it is difficult for us to realize it”. Thus, “that man, liberated from a demon, becomes a wicked man, a man oppressed by worldliness”. Pope Francis cautioned that worldliness is precisely what

the devil wants.

In fact, the Pope continued, worldliness is a “step forward” for the demon in the course of possession. “The adjective that Paul afforded to the Galatians when they set foot on this road, comes to my mind” the Pontiff explained, is “foolish: ‘O foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?’”.

Thus, the Pontiff said, “it is bewitchment; it is a seduction, because” the devil “is the father of seduction. Let’s consider what he did with Eve: he began with sweet-talking”, Francis explained, and “ended up with ‘whoever has beguiled you?’. However, “when the demon enters so gently, politely, and takes possession of our attitudes, our values shift from service to God towards worldliness”. In such cases, Francis asserted, we become “worldly” and “lukewarm Christians” who “make this mishmash, this hodgepodge between the spirit of the world and the spirit of God”. However, Francis cautioned, “we cannot live this way: this distances us from the Lord”, and it happens “too subtly”.

We must ask ourselves, the Pope said: “how do we avoid falling into this?”, and how do we find our way out?. The answer he stated clearly, is “first and foremost, rediscover the word ‘vigilance’. Do not fear; as Isaiah said to Ahaz, ‘take heed and be quiet’”. In other words, employ “vigilance and calm”. The Pontiff explained that “to hold vigil is to understand what enters my heart; it means to stop and examine my life”. In this regard, the Pope suggested the need for a personal examination of conscience: “am I a Christian? Am I raising my children well? Is my life Christian or is it worldly? How might I understand this?”.

To respond to such questions we should look to “Paul’s recipe: look to the crucified Christ”. Indeed, it “only before the Lord’s Cross” that worldliness can be found and destroyed. This is precisely “the aim of the Crucifix before us: it is not an ornament” but “is precisely what saves us from these bewitchments, from these seductions that lead to worldliness”.

Thus, the Pope posed the fundamental questions: “Do I look to the crucified Christ? Do I at times, walk the *Via Crucis* in order to see the price of salvation, the price that has saved us not only from sin but also from worldliness?”. Then, the Pontiff continued, we need an “examination of conscience” in order to verify what is happening, “but always before the crucified Christ in prayer”. Furthermore, the Pontiff added, “it would do us well to fracture, not one’s bones, but to fracture one’s convenient attitudes” and this is achieved, he asserted, through “acts of charity”. Essentially, this means admitting to oneself that “I am comfortable, but I will do that which costs me”, for example, “visit a sick person, give help to someone in need: an act of charity”. This, according to Francis, breaks down the spiritual worldliness in the person that the demons seek to create.

In conclusion, the Pope called for reflection “on these three things: on the crucified Christ will save us from these courteous demons, from this gradual slide toward worldliness; he will save us from

foolishness, from seduction. An examination of conscience will help us to perceive whether any of these transgressions are present. Acts of charity, those that are costly, will lead us to be more attentive and more vigilant, such that these sly characters cannot enter". The Pope concluded by praying that "the Lord give us this grace and help us remember the adjective Paul used: "foolish".