



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Pharisees of today

Thursday, 19 October 2017

(by: www.osservatoreromano.va)

One can never close the door on parents who ask for the baptism of their child, even though they were not married in the Church: the Christian, and especially the pastor, should never forget the gratuitousness of salvation, God's closeness and the concreteness of works of mercy, whether material or spiritual in nature. This was Pope Francis' appeal at Mass celebrated Thursday morning, 19 October, at Santa Marta.

Referring to the narrative drawn from Luke (11: 47-54), which speaks of "reproach", the Pope said here, the Lord "strikes a heavy blow". In particular, the Gospel passage offers "an expression that makes one think: 'Woe to you lawyers! for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.'" The Pontiff acknowledged that "this verse is a bit obscure" and sought to clarify it, explaining that often "people forget that all is gratuitous, that God took the initiative to save us, and they take the side of the Law and try to cling" to it and "the more detailed it is", the better. Thus, he continued, "they cling so tightly to the law that they do not receive the strength of God's justice".

Consequently, the Pope affirmed, they "come up with a heap of prescriptions and for them, this is salvation". Whereas instead, "the law is a response to God's gratuitous love: it is He who took the initiative to save us. And because You loved me so much I seek to go on your path, that which you have shown me". In other words, "I fulfill the law".

The Pope reiterated that those people “lost the key of knowledge because they lost the sense of God’s closeness”. In truth, “the God of revelation is [the] God who began to journey with us from Abraham up to Jesus: God who journeys with his People”. Therefore, “when this close relationship with the Lord is lost, one falls into this obtuse mentality that believes in the self-sufficiency of salvation through fulfillment of the law”.

And in this way, the Pope said, those people “lost the memory of God’s mercy”. They are a “measure of the fulfillment of the law”, he observed, because they help us understand what it means “to touch Christ’s flesh, touch the suffering Christ in a person, both physically and spiritually”.

In this regard, the Pope recalled “the wealthy man who in Hades asked Abraham to send one of the dead to his brothers to [warn them], so they could be saved”. But Abraham says: “No, this is not possible, for if they are not able to hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced by someone who rises from the dead”. Indeed, “if they have no mercy as he - the wealthy man did not have it – it is worth nothing. Thus, Francis presented these three omissions: the “forgetfulness of the gratuity of salvation, forgetfulness of God’s closeness, and forgetfulness of mercy”. And thus, distancing oneself from salvation is also at the root of “taking away the key of knowledge”. Therefore, the Pontiff observed, one must ask oneself what are the consequences of such forgetfulness. And the Gospel passage illustrates two, the first of which is “closure”: “These people closed the door on the faithful and the faithful did not understand”. The doctors of the law, with “all their moral theology, conducted themselves with intellectual mannerism, but did not reach the people and, in this way, they distanced the people. And, said the Pontiff, “here I think of the responsibility that we pastors have: when we pastors lose or take away the key of knowledge, we close the door on ourselves and on others”.

The Holy Father then recalled his former days in Argentina: “many times in my country, I heard of parish priests who did not baptize the children of unwed mothers because they were not born from the canonical marriage: they closed the door, scandalized the people of God because the heart of these parish priests had lost the key to knowledge”. And, the Pope recalled another, more recent example: “three months ago, in a country, in a city, a mother wanted to baptize her newly born son, but she was married civilly with a divorced man. The pastor said “yes, yes, I will baptize the baby but your husband is divorced, he stays out; he cannot be present at the ceremony”. “This is happening today”, the Pope affirmed, because “the Pharisees, doctors of the law, are not things of days gone by: even today there are many of them”.

For this reason, the Pope said, “it is necessary to pray for us pastors, so that we do not lose the key to knowledge and we do not close the door on ourselves and on the people who want to enter”.

“And the second consequence”, is also found in the Gospel, he continued. “When he came out,

the scribes and the Pharisees began to treat him in a hostile way and to make him talk about many topics, trying to trick him, in order to catch by surprise some word from his mouth". This is "a corrupt attitude" and "this is the second consequence: when one loses the key to knowledge, both in the gratuity of salvation and in the closeness of God and in works of mercy, corruption comes to pass".

And "how do the pastors of those times end up? They set traps for the Lord to snare him and then to accuse him and condemn him, as they did". In conclusion, the Pontiff suggested imploring "the Lord for the grace of remembering our salvation, the gratuity of salvation, of God's closeness" and for "the concreteness of the works of mercy that the Lord wants from us, whether material or spiritual, but concrete". With the hope that the Lord "gives us this grace" so that "we can become people who help open the door to ourselves and others".