



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Christ in the face of the outcast

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A Christian is called to recognize the Lord in the outcast, without the airs of those — and there are so many even inside the Vatican — who feel “privileged” for being included in a “band of the chosen” and in that “ecclesiastical microclimate” which in reality distances the Church from the People of God and the various peripheries. The Pope said this on Monday morning during Mass at Santa Marta.

Francis referred to a passage from the Gospel of Luke (18:35-43), indicating that “this Gospel passage begins with an unseeing man, a blind man, and ends with him receiving his sight, and ‘all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God’”. There are “three categories of people in this passage: the blind man; those who were with Jesus; and the people”, the Pope explained.

The blind man, the Pontiff continued, because of the “illness which took his sight, couldn’t see, he was begging”. And “perhaps he was often saddened” and wondered: “Why did this happen to me?”. In other words, he was a man who “couldn’t find a way out, an outcast”. And thus “the blind man was sitting by the roadside” like “so many outcasts here” in the various streets and public squares of Rome. Today, the Pope recalled, there are “so many, so many, sitting by the roadside”.

That man couldn’t see but “he wasn’t foolish: he knew all that went on in the city”. After all, “he

was right at the entrance to the city of Jericho” and thus, “he knew everything and he wanted to know everything”. Such that “he heard the noise and inquired: what’s happening?”. In any event, Francis noted, he was “a man who found a way of life along this road, a beggar, an outcast, a blind man”. However, “when he heard Jesus was coming, he cried out”. And when “they told him to be silent, he cried out even louder”. What was the reason for his behaviour? The Pope explained it this way: “This man wanted salvation, he wanted to be healed”. And thus, the Gospel reads: “Jesus said that he had faith”. Indeed, Francis explained, the blind man “gambled and won”, even though “it’s difficult to gamble when a person is so ‘debased’, so marginalized”. However, “he gambled” and he knocked “at the door of Jesus’ heart”.

The “second category of people” that we meet in the passage of the Gospel of Luke is instead comprised of “those who walked with the Lord: they were walking ahead, leading the way”. These were “the disciples, and the apostles too, those who followed Him and went with the Lord”. They were also “the converts, those who had accepted the Kingdom of God” and who “were happy about this salvation”.

This is exactly why “they rebuked the blind man to be silent”, telling him: “Calm down, be polite! It’s the Lord. Please, don’t make a scene!”. And in this way “they distanced the Lord” from the periphery. In fact, Francis stated, this peripheral man “was unable to reach the Lord, because this band — albeit with such good will — closed the door”.

Unfortunately, the Pontiff acknowledged, “this happens frequently among us believers: when we’ve found the Lord, without realizing, we create this ecclesiastical microclimate”. And this is an attitude not only of priests and bishops, but also the faithful. It’s a manner of conduct that leads us to say: “we are the ones who are with the Lord”. However, it often happens that in “looking at the Lord” we end up “not seeing the Lord’s needs: we don’t see the Lord who is hungry, who is thirsty, who is in prison, who is in the hospital”. Indeed, we fail to see the “Lord in the outcast” and this is “a very harmful climate”.

The problem, the Pope explained, is that “these people who were with Jesus had forgotten the harsh moments of their own marginalization; they had forgotten at the moment and in the place that Jesus called them”. Therefore they said: “Now we are chosen, we’re with the Lord”. And they were happy with this “little world” but they wouldn’t “allow people to disturb the Lord”, to the point that “they didn’t even allow children to approach, to draw near”. Francis remarked that they were people who “had forgotten the journey that the Lord had made with them, the journey of conversion, of calling, of healing”.

Recalling a passage from Revelation (1:1-5, 2:1-5), the Pontiff described this as a reality that “the Apostle John tells with a really beautiful phrase that we heard in the First Reading: they had forgotten, they had abandoned their first love”. And this “is a sign: in the Church, the faithful, the ministers, become a group like this, not ecclesial but ecclesiastical”, when a group is privileged

“with closeness to the Lord, there is the temptation of forgetting their first love”. It is precisely “that beautiful love which we all had when the Lord called us, saved us, said to us: I love you so much”. Even the disciples are tempted “to forget the first love, that is, to forget the peripheries, where I was before, even should I be ashamed of it”. This attitude can be expressed this way: “Lord, this one has an odour, don’t let him come to you”. But the Lord’s response is clear: “did you not have an odour when I kissed you?”.

In facing the temptation of the “bands of the chosen”, which are found in every age, the conduct of “Jesus in the Church, in the history of the Church”, is described in this way by Luke: “Jesus stopped”. This, the Pope underscored, is “a grace. When Jesus stops and says: look over there, bring him to me”, as he did with the blind man in Jericho. In this way the Lord “makes the disciples turn their heads to the suffering peripheries”, as if to say: “Do not look only at me. Yes, you must see me, but not only me! See me in others too, in the needy”.

Indeed, Francis indicated, “when God stops, He always does so with mercy and justice, but also, sometimes, he does so with anger”. This happens when the Lord “is stopped by the ruling class” which He defines as the “evil and adulterous generation”. Certainly, the Pope commented, “this was no caress”. Returning to the Gospel and the episode of the blind man in Jericho, the Pontiff wished to highlight that Jesus himself wants the man brought near and heals him, recognizing his faith: “your faith has made you well”.

The third group presented by Luke is “the simple people who needed signs of salvation”. The Gospel passage reads: “all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God”. These people were, therefore, capable of “celebrating, of praising God, of losing time with the Lord”. The Pope also noted that “so often we find simple people, so many elderly women who walk, and sacrifice so much to go and pray at a shrine of Our Lady”. They are people who “don’t ask for privileges, they ask only for grace”. They are “the faithful people who know how to follow the Lord without asking for any privileges”.

See then, Francis summarized, the three categories of people who directly call upon us: “the outcast; the privileged, those who have been chosen and who are now subject to temptation; and the faithful people who follow the Lord to praise Him because He is good, and also to ask Him for health, to ask Him for so much grace”.

This reflection, the Pope suggested, should lead us to consider “the Church, our Church, which is sitting by this roadside in Jericho”. Because “in the Bible, according to the fathers, Jericho is the symbol of sin”. Thus, he urged, “let us consider the Church watching Jesus pass, this outcast Church”. Let us consider “these nonbelievers, those who have sinned so much and who don’t want to get up, because they don’t have the strength to start over”. And, the Pontiff added, let us also consider the “Church of the children, of the sick, of the imprisoned, the Church of the simple people”, asking the Lord “that all of us, that we have the grace of having been called” and that we

“never, never, ever distance ourselves from this Church. Let us never enter into this microclimate of privileged ecclesiastical disciples who distance themselves from the Church of God, that is suffering, that is asking for salvation, that is asking for faith, that is asking for the Word of God”. Lastly, the Pope concluded, “let us ask for the grace to be faithful People of God, without asking the Lord for any privilege that may distance us from the People of God”.