



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

They shall be first

Tuesday, 16 December 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 51, 19 December 2014)

The basic condition for walking the “path of salvation” is a “contrite heart”, one that is capable of recognizing its own sins. Thus, the Lord’s “judgment” will not be one to frighten, but to offer hope. For this reason, the two Readings that Pope Francis reflected on during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, have the very “structure of a judgment”.

The Pope first referred to the passage from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah (3:1-2, 9-13), which begins with a threat: “Woe to the city, rebellious and polluted”, and then a judgment: “to the tyrannical city”, the city that “hears no voice, accepts no correction; In the Lord she has not trusted, to her God she has not drawn near”. Those people are sentenced: the “sentence” is expressed in the term “woe”. For the others, there is instead a promise: “I will change and purify the lips of the peoples”, the prophet writes. “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia”, those who pray to me “will bring me offerings. On that day you need not be ashamed of all your deeds, your rebellious actions against me”.

Who was Zephaniah talking about? He was speaking about those who drew near “to the Lord because the Lord had forgiven”, the Pope explained. These people were “the saved ones”; the others were “the proud, who didn’t hear the voice of the Lord, who didn’t accept correction, didn’t

trust in the Lord”.

To the penitent, who were capable of recognizing: “Yes, we are sinners”, Francis highlighted, the Lord reserved forgiveness and addressed “this word, which is one of those hope-filled [words] of the Old Testament: ‘I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord’”.

Here the Pope identified “the three characteristics of the faithful People of God: humility, poverty and trust in the Lord”. And this is “the path of salvation”. The others, however, “heard no voice, accepted no correction, and did not trust in the Lord”, and therefore “they cannot receive salvation”: they are “closed” to salvation, the Holy Father explained.

The same thing happens today: “When we see the holy People of God, who are humble, who have their treasure in the faith in the Lord, in the trust in the Lord; the humble, poor people who confide in the Lord”, here we meet “the saved ones”, for “this is the path” that the Church must take.

A similar dynamic is found in the day’s Reading from the Gospel of Mathew (21:28-32), in which Jesus also proposes “to the chief priests, to the elders, the elders, of the people”, to the entire “‘network’ of people who waged war”, a “judgment” to reflect upon. He presented them the case of the two sons whom the father asks to go to work in the vineyard. One answers: “I won’t go to the field. I don’t want to”. But then he goes. Meanwhile the other says: “Yes, sir”, but then thinks: “The old man has no strength, I’ll do what I want, he can’t punish me”. And therefore, “he doesn’t go, he doesn’t obey”.

Jesus asks his interlocutors: “Which of the two did his father’s will?”. Was it “the first, the one who said ‘no’”, the rebellious one who later “thought of his father” and decided to obey, or was it the second? At this point Jesus offers his judgment: “Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you”. They “will be the first”. And He explains why: “‘When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him’. You didn’t listen to John: the baptism of penitence.... The tax collectors and prostitutes, however, believed. You, on the contrary, saw these things but then you didn’t repent a bit”.

What “did these people do” to deserve this judgment? “They didn’t listen”, the Pope explained, “to the Lord’s voice, they didn’t accept correction, they didn’t trust in the Lord”. One could ask: “But Father, what a scandal that Jesus said this, that the tax collectors, who betrayed the homeland because they collected taxes to pay the Romans”. Will they really “go first to the Kingdom of Heaven?”. And the same for “the prostitutes, who are throw-away women”? And finally, “Lord, have you gone mad? We are pure, we are Catholics, we partake in communion every day, we go to Mass”. And yet, Francis underscored, they “will go first if your heart is not a contrite heart”. And “if you have not listened to the Lord, haven’t accepted correction, haven’t trusted in Him”, then

yours is not a contrite heart.

The Lord, the Pontiff continued, doesn't want these "hypocrites who were scandalized" by what "Jesus said about the tax collectors and about the prostitutes, but then secretly went to them, whether to unleash their passions or to do business". They considered themselves "pure", but in reality, "the Lord doesn't want them".

Today's liturgy makes us think about this judgment which is "a judgment that gives us hope when we look at our sins". Indeed, all of us, "we are sinners". Every one of us is well aware of our list of sins; however, Francis said, each one of us can say: "Lord, I offer You my sins, the only thing that we can offer You".

In order to better understand this, the Pontiff recalled the "life of a saint who was very generous" and offered everything to the Lord: "The Lord asked him for something and he did it". The saint always listened and always followed the Lord's will. Yet the Lord once said to him: "You still haven't given me one thing". And he, "who was so good", answered: "But, Lord, what haven't I given You? I've given you my life, I work for the poor, I work for the catechesis, I work here, I work there...". The Lord pressed on: "You haven't given me one thing". And the saint repeated, "What Lord?". And the Lord concluded, "Your sins".

And this was the lesson the Pope wanted to highlight: that, when we are able to say: "Lord, these are my sins, they aren't this man's or that woman's.... They're mine. You take them. This way I'll be saved". When we are able to do this, then "we will be that beautiful people — 'the humble and poor people' — who trust in the name of the Lord".