



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

To serve, not to be served

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There are priests and bishops who are “climbers and attached to money” who, “rather than serving, use the Church”, making her “lukewarm”, a “business”, by enjoying their comfortable status without being honest. The Pope warned about this “temptation of a double life”, in his homily on Friday during Mass at Santa Marta. The morning celebration, he shared, is often attended by missionaries and nuns who have given the whole of their lives to serving others, making themselves over in the likes of St Paul, always going “a step further, always going forth”.

“Today’s Liturgy”, Francis began, “brings us to reflect on two figures, two servant figures, workers, two people who are called to a task”. In the passage from the Letter to the Romans (15:14-21), Paul’s “true zeal for evangelizing” emerges. The Apostle writes: “You know, because of the grace given me by God” — what was the grace he had received? — “to be a minister of Christ Jesus, fulfilling the sacred ministry”. That is to say, “ministering, serving”. Thus, “Paul took this vocation seriously and gave himself wholly to service, he never kept still, always a step further, further, further... in order later, later here in Rome, to be betrayed by several of his own. And he ended up actually condemned”.

But “where does Paul’s greatness, this boldness come from?”. He states: “I boast of this”. So,

“what does he boast about? He boasts of Jesus Christ”. In the day’s Reading from his Letter to the Romans, we read: “In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit”.

It was with this attitude, the Pontiff continued, that St Paul “went everywhere: he boasted of serving, of being chosen, of having the power of the Holy Spirit, of going all over the world”. But “there was something that was a great joy for him”. He spoke of it in this way: of having made it “my ambition” — and what was this ambition? — “to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation”. In other words, “Paul went to where Christ’s name was not known; he was the servant who served, administered, laying the foundations, that is, proclaiming Jesus Christ, always a step further, always going forth, always farther away; he never stopped to have the advantage of a position, of authority, of being served”. Paul “was a minister, a servant in order to serve, not to be served”.

Pope Francis shared the joy he feels, how he is moved when, at the morning Masses celebrated in the chapel at Santa Marta, “priests come and greet me”. They say: “Father, I came here to visit my family, because I have been a missionary in the Amazon for 40 years”. Joy and emotions also arise from the witness of a nun who has worked “for 30 years in a hospital in Africa”, or “who for 30 or 40 years has been in a hospital ward with the disabled, always smiling”.

Here then, Francis affirmed, “this is called serving, this is the joy of the Church: to go a step further, always; to go further and give life”. This is exactly “what Paul did: serve”.

Turning then to the day’s passage from the Gospel according to Luke (16:1-8), which speaks of the dishonest steward, the Pope pointed out that “the Lord shows us the image of another servant who, instead of serving others, uses others”. In the Gospel, Francis continued, “we read what this servant did, with much deceitfulness he took steps to maintain his post, in another way, but always with a certain dignity”. And in the Church too, the Pope said, “there are those who, rather than serving, thinking of others, laying the foundations”, instead they “use the Church”. These are the “climbers”, those who are “attached to money”, and “how many priests and bishops have we seen like this? It is sad to say, isn’t it?”.

Francis explained that “the radicalness of the Gospel, of the call of Jesus Christ, is in serving: being of service, never stopping, always going the extra step, forgetting about oneself”.

On the other hand, there is instead “the comfort of status: I have reached a certain status and I live comfortably without being honest, like those Pharisees whom Jesus speaks about, who go about in the market places, to be seen by others”. These are the “two images: two images of Christians, two images of priests, two images of nuns. Two images”.

In St Paul, Pope Francis explained, “Jesus shows us” the “model” of a “Church that never stands still, that always builds the foundation, that always goes forward and shows us that this is the way”. Instead, however, “when the Church is lukewarm, closed within herself, often times even a business, it cannot be said that she is a Church that ministers, that is at service, but she instead uses others”.

Francis concluded with a prayer that the Lord grant “the grace that he gave to Paul, that ambition to always go forward, always, so often renouncing one’s comfort”. In this way “we are saved from temptation, from this temptation that is basically to a double life: I’m seen as a minister, but essentially I use others”.