



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The hypocrite is always a flatterer

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“A true Christian cannot be a hypocrite, and a hypocrite is not a true Christian”: Pope Francis spoke unequivocally against the temptation to be “two-faced”. This was his focus during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 6 June, as he reflected on the day’s passage from the Gospel of Mark (12:13-17) in which “some Pharisees and Herodians” were seeking to entrap Jesus.

“In the Gospel passage”, the Pope noted, “there is a word which Jesus uses a lot to characterize the doctors of the law”, because he recognized their hypocrisy. Thus, “‘hypocrite’ is the word he uses often to characterize them”. Pope Francis explained that they are “hypocrites because they show one thing while they are thinking of something else”. Actually, the Pope added, alluding to the Greek etymology of the word, “they speak, they judge, but underneath there is something else”. Nothing could be more different from Jesus’ way: hypocrisy, in fact “is not the language of Jesus. Hypocrisy is not the language of Christians”. This fact is absolutely “clear”.

However, as Jesus takes care to highlight this characteristic, Francis observed, it is important that we fully understand it and recognize “how they act”, how hypocrites behave.

Above all, the Pope said, “the hypocrite is always a flatterer”, whether to a greater or lesser degree, “but he is a flatterer”. Thus, for example, they say to Jesus: “Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God”. In other words, they use “that flattery which softens the heart” and weakens resistance in life.

Therefore “hypocrites always begin with flattery. And then they ask a question”. Part of flattery is to “not speak the truth”, to “exaggerate”, to “boost vanity”. In this regard, the Holy Father recalled a priest whom he “knew a long time ago, not here” — who, “poor man, drank up all the flattery that others gave him; it was his weakness. And his friends said that he had learnt the liturgy poorly” since he had not understood the true meaning of “incensing”.

So, the Pope continued, “flattery always begins like this, but with an evil intention”. This can be clearly seen in the Gospel passage: in order to put Jesus to the test, the Pharisees “fawned over him, so that he might believe them and slip up”. This is the hypocrite’s technique: “he shows you that he likes you; he always puffs you up, in order to achieve his aim”.

The Pope then underscored “a second aspect” found in “what Jesus does” when confronted with this “two-faced” ploy of the hypocrites, who ask a fair question but “with an unjust intention”. They ask him: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, is it just?” — Jesus, “knowing their hypocrisy, states clearly: ‘Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it’”. Observe Jesus’ technique: “to hypocrites and ideologues”, Pope Francis said, Jesus always “responds with reality. The reality is so, everything else is either hypocrisy or ideology”.

This is why Jesus says: “bring me a coin”. He actually wants to show “reality”. He responds “with wisdom” when he says: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ — the reality was that the coin bore the image of Caesar — ‘and to God the things that are God’s’”.

Lastly, the Holy Father said, it is important to note a “third aspect” relative to the “language of hypocrisy”: that it is “a language of deceit, and is the same language as the serpent’s with Eve; it is the same. It begins with flattery: ‘No ... if you eat of this you will be great, you will know all...’, in order to destroy her”.

Hypocrisy, in fact, “destroys; hypocrisy kills; it kills people, even so far as to strip away a person’s character and soul. It kills communities” the Pope explained. And, he added, “when there are hypocrites in a community there is a great danger there; there is a very horrible danger”. For this reason, “the Lord Jesus said to us: ‘Let your speech be: yes, yes, no, no. Anything more comes from the evil one’. He was very clear”. In this regard, Pope Francis recalled, “James, in his Letter, was even stronger: ‘Let your yes be yes and your no be no’”.

These clear words help us understand today just “how much evil” hypocrisy does to the Church.

How much evil is achieved by “those Christians who fall into this sinful practice which kills”. This is because, the Holy Father emphasized, “the hypocrite is capable of killing a community. He speaks sweetly, while judging a person harshly. The hypocrite is a killer”. In conclusion, the Pope summarized his reflection by recalling that hypocrisy “begins with flattery”, to which one must respond only “with reality”; and that hypocrisy uses “the same language as the devil who sows that duplicitous language in communities in order to destroy them”. Therefore, the Pope said, “let us ask the Lord to protect us from falling into this vice of hypocrisy”, from “masking our attitude, but with evil intentions. That the Lord might give us this grace: ‘Lord, that I might never be a hypocrite, that I might know how to speak the truth and if I cannot say it, to stay silent, but never hypocrisy ...’”.