



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The icon of the fool

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(by: www.osservatoreromano.va)

“The way of folly leads to corruption” Pope Francis asserted while celebrating Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 17 October.

“In today’s liturgy of the Word,” he began, “the word ‘fool’ is mentioned twice. Jesus says it to the doctors of the law, to some of the Pharisees (Lk 11:37-41); and Paul says it to the pagans: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Rom 1:16-25). Francis however, also referred to a third case: Paul called the Galatians foolish because “they let themselves be misled, bewitched by new ideas”. Consequently, “this word said to the doctors of the law, to the pagans and Christians who let themselves be bewitched by ideologies,” Francis explained, “is a condemnation”. Moreover, “it reveals the way of folly”, which in turn, the Pope asserted, “leads to corruption”.

The Pontiff proceeded to highlight the nature of the three kinds of fool subject to corruption. Firstly, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, to whom “Jesus said: ‘you are like graves which are not seen’: on the outside they appear beautiful”, Francis explained, “but on the inside they are full of bone and rot. Corrupt.” Thus, the Pharisees “became corrupt, for they “emphasized only appearances, and not what was inside; they were corrupted by vanity, appearances, outward beauty, exterior justice. They became corrupt because they were only concerned with polishing, making beautiful the external aspect of things; they did not delve within: corruption is within, akin to the graves”.

The second kind of fool refers to the pagans whom, in the day's reading, Paul accused of having "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity". In this case too, the pagans "exchanged the glory of God – which they could have known through reason – for idols." Such corruption is one of "idolatry, of many idolatries" Francis concluded, then warned that the corruption of idolatry applies not only to ancient times, but has relevance in the present day, for example, in "consumerism" and "the idolatry of seeking a convenient god."

The third kind of fool refers to the Galatians. Francis asserted that in "allowing themselves to be corrupted by ideologies, they renounce being Christian in order to become ideologues of Christianity". Ultimately, however, the Pontiff concluded that all three of these categories, in their own manner, "end in corruption, by way of this folly".

From here comes the question: "What is this foolishness?" And the Pope's essential reply was that "it is a failure to listen. It is literally a '*nescio*', an 'I don't know how'", he said, an incapacity to listen. "When the Word does not enter, I am not letting it enter because I am not listening to it. The fool does not listen. He believes he is listening, but he does not listen. He does his own thing, always, and for this reason, the Word of God cannot enter his heart and there is no room for love". Or, and this is often the case, the Pope observed, if the Word does enter, "it does so in a distilled fashion, transformed by one's concept of reality".

Therefore, Francis asserted that "fools do not know how to listen and this deafness leads them to corruption. The Word of God does not enter; there is no room for love and finally there is no room for freedom". In this respect, "Paul was clear: they became slaves. 'God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves'". They became slaves, the Pope explained, "because they exchanged the truth of God with falsehood, adoring and serving creatures rather than the Creator". Indeed, he continued, "they are not free; and this failure to listen, this deafness leaves no room for love or freedom: it always leads to slavery".

Thus, it would be appropriate to ask ourselves: "Do I listen to the word of God? Do I let it enter?" the Pope asked. "The word of God is alive; it is efficacious; it discerns the sentiments and thoughts of the heart; it cuts; it goes inside." He encouraged the faithful to question whether we let the Word enter our hearts, or if we remain deaf to it. Moreover, "do I transform it in appearance?" he inquired. "Do I transform it into idolatry, into idolatrous habits, or do I transform it into ideology", and thus it does not enter? This, the Pontiff cautioned, "is the folly of Christians".

Finally, Francis recommended a further step, that is, "just as the icons of the saints do us so much good", we should "look at the icon of the fools of today" – and there are many of these, he said. "There are foolish Christians and also foolish pastors", those whom, the Pope recalled, "Saint Augustine 'lambasted' vehemently. For the folly of the shepherd harms the flock; the folly of the corrupt shepherd, as well as the folly of the self-satisfied pastor, the pagan, and the folly of the

pastor ideologue”.

Thus the Pontiff came to his conclusion. “Let us look at the icon of the foolish Christian, and next to this folly let us look at the Lord who is always at the door: he knocks at the door and waits”. It is a matter of contemplating “the Lord’s nostalgia, when he remembers the good times: ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown’; God’s nostalgia for the love he had for us at first”. In fact, “if we fall prey to this folly and we distance ourselves, he feels this nostalgia; nostalgia for us”. Just as “Jesus wept with this nostalgia; he wept over Jerusalem. It was the nostalgia for a people whom he had chosen, whom he had loved, but who had distanced themselves through folly; they had preferred appearances, idols or ideologies”.