



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The threat of gossip

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(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 36, 4 September 2013)

Gossip is a weapon and it threatens the human community every day; it sows envy, jealousy and power struggles. It has even caused murder. Therefore, discussing peace must take into account the evil that can be done with one's tongue. Pope Francis resumed his daily Mass in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae on Monday, 2 September, taking up a familiar theme in his homily: the evil of gossip.

The Pope drew his inspiration from the narrative of Jesus' return to Nazareth as it is told in Luke (4:16-30). It is a "dramatic" Gospel passage, the Pontiff said, in it "we see what our soul is like", how the wind seems to turn it from one direction to another. In Nazareth "all were waiting for Jesus. Everyone wanted to meet him because they had heard of all he had done in Capernaum, the miracles. And when the ceremony began, they asked their guest to read from the Book. Jesus did so and read from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah which was a prophecy about him. It was for this reason that he ended his reading with the words: 'today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'".

Their first reaction, the Pope said, was positive. Then, however, the worm of envy began to work its way into someone's mind and they began to say: "where did this man study? Is this not

Joseph's son? And we all know who he is related to"... So they began to clamour for him to do a miracle: only then would they believe. "They wanted", the Pontiff explained, "a show. 'Work a miracle and we will all believe in you!'; but Jesus is not a performing artist".

Jesus worked no miracle in Nazareth. He pointed to the little faith of those who asked for a "show". "They became angry", Pope Francis continued, "they stood up and led Jesus to the brow of the hill that they might throw him down and kill him". What had begun in joy almost ended in crime, "out of jealousy, out of envy".

This isn't just about 2,000 years ago, Francis warned, "it happens every day", he said, "in our heart, in our communities". We might welcome someone and speak well of him the first day but little by little that worm eats away at our minds until our gossip "banishes him" from good opinion. That person in a community who gossips against his or her neighbour is, in a sense, killing him. "The Apostle John", the Pope said, "in chapter 3 of his First Letter, v. 15, tells us that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer". And the Pope immediately added: "we are used to gossip, to spreading rumours, and we often transform our communities as well as our family into 'hell' where this kind of crime that leads "to killing one's brother and sister with one's tongue is manifest".

"The Bible", the Pope continued, "says that the devil came into the world through envy. A community, a family is destroyed by this envy that the devil teaches in the heart and causes one to speak ill of the other". And referring to what has been happening in these days, he stressed the need to think also of our own daily weapons: "the tongue, gossip, tittle-tattle".

In order "that there may be peace in a community, in a family, in a country, in the world, we must start by being with the Lord. And where the Lord is there is no envy, there is no crime, there is no jealousy; there is brotherhood. Let us ask this of the Lord: never to kill our neighbour with our tongue, and to be with the Lord just as we shall all be in heaven".