



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

When the poor end up paying

Monday, 16 June 2014

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 25, 20 June 2014)

It's always the poor who pay the price of corruption. Every type of corruption: that of politicians and businessmen, but also that of clergymen who neglect their "pastoral duty" in order to cultivate "power". Pope Francis strongly denounced "the sin of corruption", into which fall many people in power, whether material, political or spiritual power. During Mass on Monday morning, 16 June, Pope Francis called for prayers particularly for the many people "who pay for corruption", calling them "martyrs of political corruption, economic corruption and ecclesiastical corruption".

Focusing on the day's reading from the First Book of Kings (21:1-16), the Pontiff recounted the story of Naboth the Jezreelite, who was stoned to death at the insistence of Queen Jezebel after he had refused to surrender his vineyard, "the inheritance of his fathers" to King Ahab. "A very sad Bible passage", the Bishop of Rome said, noting that the story's structure parallels the trial of Jesus and that of the martyrdom of St Stephen. He also referred to a phrase from the Gospel of Mark (10:42): "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them".

"Naboth resembles a martyr, a martyr to that king, who lords over and oppresses", remarked the Pope. To get his hands on the vineyard, Ahab at first makes a genuine proposal to Naboth: "I'll buy it from you, I'll trade you another for it". Then, however, in response to the man's refusal to give up "the inheritance of his fathers", he goes home, "embittered, disdained", behaving almost

like a “spoiled child ... throwing a tantrum”. It’s at this point that his wife, Jezebel — “the same one who had threatened the Prophet Elijah with death, after he had killed the priests of Baal” — organized a trial with false witnesses and had them kill Naboth, allowing her husband to take possession of the vineyard. And Ahab does it, the Pontiff pointed out, “calmly, as if nothing had happened”.

This is a story, admonished Pope Francis, that “continually repeats itself in people who have power”, material, political or spiritual power. “But this is a sin: it’s the sin of corruption.” And how does it corrupt a person? “It corrupts on the very road to security. First, wellbeing, money, then power, vanity, pride, and from there everything: even murder”.

The Pope observed that newspapers often report that “the politician who magically got rich has been taken to court” or “that company boss who became magically wealthy, that is, by exploiting his workers”. Too often they speak of “a prelate who has gotten too rich and left his pastoral duty to secure his power”. Thus, he said, there are “corrupt politicians, corrupt businessmen and corrupt clergymen”. And they are “everywhere”. Because, the Pontiff explained, corruption “is a sin that’s right at the fingertips” of “that person with authority over others”, whether his authority is “economic, political or ecclesiastical. We are all tempted by corruption. It’s a sin at your fingertips”.

He continued that “someone has authority, he feels powerful, he feels like God”. Corruption is thus “a daily temptation”, into which “a politician, a businessman, a prelate” can fall.

But “who pays for corruption?”, Pope Francis asked. It is certainly not paid for by the one who “takes the bribe”: in fact, that person is only the “intermediary”. In reality, the Pope emphasized, “the poor pay for corruption!” It wasn’t by chance that Naboth paid for King Ahab’s corruption. “Naboth, the poor man, faithful to his traditions, faithful to his values, faithful to the inheritance received from his father”.

“When we speak of corrupt politicians or corrupt businessmen, who pays for this?” the Pope wondered. He answered, “the hospitals that have not medicine, the sick who receive no treatment, children who have no education. They are the modern day Naboths, who pay for corruption of the powerful”. And, he continued, “who pays for the corruption of a prelate? It’s paid for by the children, who don’t know how to make the sign of the cross, who don’t know the catechism, who aren’t cared for; it’s paid for by the sick who aren’t visited; it’s paid for by the imprisoned who don’t receive spiritual attention”. Corruption is ultimately paid for by the poor: the “materially poor” and the “spiritually poor”.

“Among you, however, it isn’t so” Jesus said to his disciples, commanding he who “has power” to become “the servant”. And effectively, Francis recalled, “the only road leading out of corruption, the only path to conquer temptation, the sin of corruption, is service. Because corruption comes from pride, from arrogance, and service is humbling: it is precisely the humble charity of helping

others”.

The Bishop of Rome concluded by remarking on the value of the witness of Naboth, who “did not want to sell the inheritance of his fathers, of his ancestors, his values”: a witness so much more meaningful considering that often, “when there is corruption”, even the poor risk losing “their values, because the customs and laws become imposed, which run against the values we received from our ancestors”. Pope Francis invited prayer for the many “martyrs of corruption”, that “the Lord draws us near to them” and give to these poor the “strength to move forward” in their witness.