



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Prayers in the darkness

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During Mass at Santa Marta Pope Francis called for prayer, like that of the Church, for those everywhere who suffer as Jesus did, even in today's world. He invoked prayer for, above all, "those of our brothers and sisters who, in order to be Christians, are driven from their homes and are left with nothing", for the elderly who are left aside and the sick alone in hospitals: for all those who are living through "dark times".

The Pontiff's reflection arose from the day's First Reading from the Book of Job (3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23), which contains "a prayer" which the Pope deemed "a bit special; the Bible itself says that it is a curse", he explained. In fact, "Job opened his mouth and cursed" the day he was born. He complained "about what happened to him" in these words: "Let the day perish wherein I was born.... Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?... For then I should have lain down and been quiet.... Or why was I not as a hidden untimely birth, as infants that never see the light?".

The Bishop of Rome pointed out in this regard, that "Job, a rich man, a righteous man who truly adored God and followed the path of the Commandments", said these things after he "lost everything. He was put to the test: he lost his whole family, all his possessions, his health, and his

whole body had become afflicted. In other words, “in that moment he lost his patience and he said these things. They were bad! But he was used to speaking the truth and this was the truth that he felt in that moment”. To the point of saying, “I am alone. I am abandoned. Why? Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, ‘A man-child is conceived’”.

In Job’s words, the Pope recognized a sort of “curse against his whole life”, highlighting that it is declared during the “dark moments” of his life. And the same thing also happens in Jeremiah, in Chapter 20: “Cursed be the day on which I was born!”. Words which beg the question, “Is this man blaspheming?” This man, all alone, with these words, “is he blaspheming? Does Jeremiah blaspheme? Jesus, when he laments — ‘Father, why have you abandoned me?’ — is he blaspheming? This is the mystery”.

The Pontiff confided that many times in his pastoral experience, he himself hears “people who are living in difficult, sorrowful situations, who have lost so much or who feel alone and abandoned and come to complain and to ask these questions: Why? They rebel against God”. And the Pope’s answer is: “Continue to pray in this way, because this too is a prayer”. As was that of Jesus, when he asked the Father: “Why have you abandoned me?”, and like that of Job. Because “to pray is to become truthful before God. One prays with reality. True prayer comes from the heart, from the moment that one is living”. It is “prayer in moments of darkness, in the moments of life where there is no hope” and when “the horizon cannot be seen”; to the point that “many times our memory is lost and we have nowhere to anchor our hope”.

Hence the relevance of God’s word, because today too, “many people are in Job’s situation. So many good people, like Job, do not understand what has happened to them. So many brothers and sisters who have no hope”. The Pontiff’s thought immediately went “to the great tragedies” such as those of Christians being driven from their homes and deprived of everything, who wonder, “But Lord, I believed in you. Why?”. Why “is it a curse to believe in you?”. It is the same for “the elderly left aside”, for the sick, for people alone in hospitals. It is in fact, “for all these people, these brothers and sisters of ours, and for us too, when we walk the path in the dark”, that “the Church prays”. And in doing so, “she takes this sorrow upon herself”.

An example in this sense comes from another of the day’s Readings, Psalm 87, which reads: “For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit; I am a man who has not strength, like one forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom thou dost remember no more”. In exactly this way, Francis stated, “the Church prays for all those who are in the trial of darkness”.

In addition to these people, those “without illness, without hunger, without important needs” also have “a bit of darkness in the soul”. There are situations in which “we believe we are martyrs and we stop praying”, saying we are angry with God, to the point of no longer even going to Mass.

On the contrary, the passage from the day's Scripture "teaches us the wisdom of prayer in the darkness, of prayer without hope". And the Pope cited the example of St Teresa of the Child Jesus, who, "in her last years of life, tried to think of heaven" and "felt inside her, like a voice that said 'Do not be foolish, do not make believe. Do you know what is waiting for you? Nothing!'".

Many times all of us, after all, "experience this situation. And many people think of ending up in nothingness". But St Teresa protected herself from this pitfall: she "prayed and asked for the strength to go on, in the dark. This is called 'entering with patience'". It is a virtue that is cultivated with prayer, because, the Bishop of Rome admonished, "our life is too easy, our complaints are complaints for the theatre" when compared to the "complaints of so many people, of many brothers and sisters who are in the dark, who have almost lost their memory, almost lost hope, who are outcasts, even from themselves".

The Holy Father recalled that Jesus himself had journeyed on "this path: from the evening on the Mount of Olives to the last words on the Cross: "Father, why have you abandoned me?". The Pope offered two concluding thoughts "that may be useful". The first was a call to "prepare yourself, for when darkness comes". Darkness "will come, perhaps not as it did to Job", perhaps not as difficult, "but we will have a time of darkness". Everyone will. This is why it is necessary to "prepare the heart for that moment". This second closing thought was a call "to pray, as the Church prays, with the Church, for so many brothers and sisters who suffer being outcast from themselves, in darkness and in suffering, with no hope at hand".