



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Open to surprises

Tuesday, 28 April 2015

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Ask the Lord for “the grace to not be afraid when the Spirit, with confidence, tells me to take a step forward”. Also ask for “apostolic courage to live life and not to make a museum of memories of our Christian life”. With this twofold advice Pope Francis concluded his homily for the Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning.

The Pontiff focused in particular on the First Reading of the day, taken from the Acts of the Apostles (11:19-26), which tells that “after the first times of joy, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there were beautiful moments in the Church, but also many problems”. One of these is seen in the fact that a few were preaching “the Gospel to Greeks, to pagans, to those who weren’t Israelites”. In fact, Francis explained, “this was so curious, it seemed a new doctrine”. After all, he noted, there had already been the episode in which Peter was rebuked after going to Cornelius’ house: “You went there, you entered a pagan house! You have become unclean!”.

Here something similar was happening: “after the persecution, after the martyrdom of Stephen”, the disciples scattered and only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem. Some of the disciples went to “Antioch and were preaching in the synagogues to Jews”. But “others, who came from Cyprus

and Cyrene, 'spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord'".

Thus, when "news of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem', it created apprehension". At this point the Apostles dispatched "a sort of 'canonical visit', saying to Barnabas: 'Go, pay a visit there and then we'll see what is to be done". However, "when Barnabas came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he brought back tranquillity and peace to Jerusalem". For the Pope, this narrative from the Acts of the Apostles speaks once again of "newness", which bursts "into that mentality" according to which Jesus came only "to save his people, the people chosen by the Father". This mentality was still unable to grasp the idea "that other peoples were to take part" in the divine plan of salvation.

"But it was there in the prophecies", the Pontiff indicated, referring to the Book of Isaiah. Yet they "didn't understand. They didn't understand that God is the God of newness: 'I make all things new'". They didn't understand "that the Holy Spirit came precisely for this reason, to renew us and He constantly works to renew us". Instead, the Pope observed, "this caused fear. In the history of the Church we can see from then until today how much fear arose from the surprises of the Holy Spirit". Some might object, "But Father, there is newness and there is newness! Some newness can be seen as God's, others cannot". Francis responded to them with Peter's words to his brothers in Jerusalem, when they rebuked him for entering Cornelius' house: "When I saw that they were given what we had received, who was I to deny baptism?"

The same idea is present in the passage from the day's Reading regarding Barnabas, who is described as "a good man" and "full of the Holy Spirit". This highlights that "in both there is the Holy Spirit, who lets the truth be seen", something which we cannot do "on our own". We can't see it "with our intelligence", the Pope said, explaining: "We can study all of salvation history, we can study all of theology, but without the Spirit we cannot understand. It is precisely the Spirit who lets us understand the truth or — to use Jesus' words — it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to know Jesus' voice: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'".

In short, to Francis "the Church's going forth is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who is at work". Similarly "Jesus said to the Apostles: 'I will send the gift of the Father and He will remind you and teach you'". How? By recalling what Jesus says and by referring to the prophecies: "This is why, in the first discourses, even that of St Stephen, there is a re-reading", the Pontiff clarified, "of all the prophecies. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes us recall history with the Risen Jesus as the key: 'and He will teach you the way'".

In this regard the Pope also suggested how to be certain that the voice we hear is Jesus' voice, and that whatever we feel we have to do is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is necessary, he said, "to pray. Without prayer, there is no room for the Holy Spirit". We must "ask God to send us this gift: 'Lord, give us the Holy Spirit, that we may discern in every moment what we have to do'".

However, this “doesn’t mean always repeating the same thing. The message is the same: but the Church goes forth, the Church goes forth with these surprises, with this newness of the Holy Spirit”.

Thus “it must be discerned, and to discern it one must pray, ask for this grace” — just like Barnabas, who “was full of the Holy Spirit and who understood straight away”. Also like Peter, who “saw and said: ‘who am I to deny baptism here?’”. Indeed, the Holy Spirit “doesn’t let us make mistakes”.

In this case too, the Pope said he was well aware of the objections that could be raised against his reasoning: “Father, why create so many problems? Let’s do things as we have always done them, that way we are more certain”. He responded that this hypothesis might be “an alternative”, but it would be “a sterile alternative; a ‘dead’ alternative”. What is much better, he concluded, is “with prayer, with humility, to take the risk of accepting what the Spirit asks us to change according to the time in which we live: this is the way”.