



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Three traits

Tuesday, 15 December 2015

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What are the features of the People of God? What should the Church be like? This was the theme of Pope Francis' homily for the Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning.

In the day's passage from the Gospel according to Matthew (21:28-32), Jesus states to the chief priests and elders: "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you". The Pontiff pointed out Jesus' "energy" in reproaching those who were considered masters of "how to think, judge, and live". The prophet Zephaniah too, in the First Reading (3:1-2, 9-13), "takes on the voice of God and says: 'Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God'". It is basically "the same reprimand" aimed "at the chosen people, at the clerics of those times". Moreover, the Pope emphasized, "to say to a priest, to a chief priest, that a harlot is holier than he in the kingdom of Heaven" is a very strong charge.

Jesus "had the courage to speak the truth". However, Francis said, considering certain reprimands, one has to wonder: "What should the Church be like? The people we read about in the Bible were indeed "men of the church". They were "heads of the Church". Jesus came, John the Baptist came, but those men "didn't listen". In the passage, the prophet recalls that although

God chose his people, “this people became a rebellious city, an impure city. They did not accept how the Church should be, how the People of God should be”.

However, the prophet Zephaniah communicates God’s promise to the people: “I will forgive you”. That is, the Pope explained, in order “for the People of God, the Church, all of us to be faithful, the first step is to feel we are forgiven.

After the promise of forgiveness, there is also the explanation of “how the Church is supposed to be: ‘For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord’”. Thus, the faithful People of God, Francis continued, must “have these three traits: humble, lowly, with trust in the Lord”. At this point the Pontiff began his analysis of each of the three fundamental features.

First of all the Church has to be “humble”. In other words a Church should “not show off her powers, her grandeur”. However, the Pope advised, “humility doesn’t mean a lethargic, weary person” with a demure expression, because this “is not humility, this is theatrics! This is feigned humility”. True humility, instead, begins “with the first step: ‘I am a sinner’”. Francis explained that if “you are not able to tell yourself that you are a sinner and that others are better than you, you are not humble”. Thus, “the first step for a humble Church is feeling that she is a sinner” and the same is true for “all of us”. On the other hand, if “any of us has the habit of looking at others’ defects and gossiping”, this is not humility. It is instead “thinking that you are the judge of others”. The prophet says: “I will leave in the midst of you a humble people”. This, the Pontiff advised, is a grace, and “we must ask for this grace, that the Church may be humble, that I may be humble, that each one of us may be humble”.

His meditation then passed on to the second trait: the People of God “is poor”. In this regard Pope Francis recalled that poverty is “the first of the Beatitudes”, but what does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? It means “being attached only to God’s treasures”. It definitely does not mean “a Church that exists attached to money, that thinks about money, that thinks about how to earn money...”. For example, the Pope explained, there was someone who “innocently” said to the people that in order to pass through the Holy Door “you have to make an offering”. This, the Pontiff clarified, “is not the Church of Jesus, this is the Church of those chief priests, attached to money”.

To further explain his thoughts, Francis recalled the story of Deacon Lawrence — the “treasurer of the diocese”, — who, when the emperor asked him to “bring the riches of the diocese” to turn them over in order to avoid being killed, St Lawrence returned “with the poor”. Thus the poor are actually “the treasure of the Church”. You can even be “the head of a bank”, as long as “your heart is poor, not attached to money” and you place yourself “at the service” of others. “Poverty”, the Pope added, is characterized by “this detachment” which leads us to “serve the needy”. He concluded this line of reasoning by directing a question to each person: “Am I or am I not poor?”.

Lastly, the third trait: the People of God “shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord”. This too brings up a very direct question: “Where do I place my trust? In power, in friends, in money? In the Lord!”.

Thus it is this “legacy that the Lord promises us: ‘I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord’. Humble because they feel they are sinners; poor because their heart is attached to God’s treasures, and if they have them it is only to administer them; seeking refuge in the Lord because they know that the Lord alone can guarantee what is good for them”. This is why Jesus had to tell the chief priests, “who did not understand these things”, that “a harlot would enter the kingdom of God before them”. And, the Pontiff concluded, as we await the Lord this Christmas, let us ask that he give us “a humble heart”, a heart that is “poor” and above all that seeks “refuge in the Lord”, because “the Lord never disappoints”.