



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A step forward

Friday, 15 January 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 3, 22 January 2016)

Faith is “a gift” that one cannot buy or acquire on their own merits. On Friday, Pope Francis drew inspiration from the day’s liturgy as he continued speaking on the characteristics of faith.

He recalled that the day before, the Gospel had presented the story of the leper who said to Jesus: “if you will, you can make me clean”. The Pontiff paused to ponder other “determined” and “courageous” figures who were inspired by faith. He resumed with the passage from Mark (2:1-12), returning to the episode of the paralytic whose friends carried him to Jesus who, “as usual, was in the midst of the people, many people”. The friends tried everything to get the sick man close to Jesus, “but they did not consider the risks” that arose from “taking that pallet up to the roof” or of the risk that “the owner of the house might call the police and they would be put in jail”. Indeed, they “thought only about getting close to Jesus. They had faith”.

This faith, the Pope said, is the same as that “of the woman who, also in the middle of the crowd, as Jesus was going to the home of Jairus, managed to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment, Jesus’ cloak, in order to be healed”. It is the same as the “faith of the centurion who said: ‘No, no Master, do not trouble yourself... but say the word, and let my servant be healed’”. It is a faith that is “strong, courageous, that goes forth” with an “open heart”.

At this point however, Francis emphasized, “Jesus takes a step forward”. To explain, the Pontiff recalled another episode of the Gospel in which Jesus, “in Nazareth, at the start of his ministry, had gone to the synagogue and said that he had been sent to free the oppressed, the imprisoned, to give sight to the blind... inaugurating a year of grace, in other words a year — it can be understood — to forgive, to draw closer to the Lord”. However, he pointed to a new path, “a path to God”. The same thing happened with the paralytic, to whom he did not simply say: “be healed”, but rather: “your sins are forgiven”.

With this innovation, the Pope said, Jesus triggered the reactions “of those whose hearts were closed”. They had “already accepted, to a certain point, that Jesus was a healer”; but that he also pardoned sinners — this was “too much” for them. They were thinking: “He has no right to say this, because God alone can forgive sins”.

Jesus persisted: “Why do you think such things? Because you know that the Son of Man has power” — and here, Francis explained, is “the step forward: forgiving sins. Rise, take up and be healed”. Jesus begins to speak using language “which at a certain point discourages people”. It is harsh language, with which “he speaks of eating his body as a way to salvation”. In other words, he begins to “reveal himself as God”, which he will clearly do before the high priest, saying: “I am the Son of God”.

It is a step forward that is also proposed to Christian faithful. Each one of us, indeed, can have faith in “Christ the Son of God, sent by the Father to save us: yes, to save us from sickness”, and there are “many good things that the Lord has done and helps us to do”; but more importantly we must have faith that he came to “save us from our sins, to save us and lead us to the Father”. This, Pope Francis said, is “the most difficult point to understand”. Not only for the scribes, who said: “It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins by God alone?”. Several of the disciples, in fact, “doubt and leave” when Jesus shows himself as having “a greater mission than that of man, to give that forgiveness, to give life, to recreate humanity”. So much so that Jesus “must ask his little group: ‘Do you also want to leave?’”.

The Pontiff drew upon Jesus’ question and invited each of us to ask ourselves: “How is my faith in Jesus Christ? Do I believe that Jesus Christ is God, that he is the Son of God? Does this faith change my life? Does it lead my heart to renew itself in this year of grace, this year of forgiveness, this year of drawing closer to the Lord?”.

It is an invitation to discover the quality of faith, knowing that it “is a gift. No one ‘earns’ faith. No one can buy it”. Therefore, the Pontiff feels it is important to ask: “Does ‘my’ faith in Jesus Christ, lead me to humiliation? I’m not saying to humility. To humiliation, to repentance, to prayer, so as to ask: ‘Forgive me, Lord’” and to say “You are God. You ‘can’ forgive my sins”.

Then came the concluding prayer: “May the Lord make us grow in faith” so that we may be like

those who, having heard Jesus and seen his works “were astonished and praised God”. In fact praise is “the proof that I believe that Jesus Christ is God in my life, that he was sent to me in order ‘to forgive me’”. And praise, the Pontiff added, “is free. It is a sentiment the Holy Spirit gives and it leads you to say: ‘You are the One God’”.