



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Saint and sinner

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Despite their sins, every man and woman has been chosen to be a saint. This message of comfort and hope was offered by Pope Francis on Tuesday morning during Mass at Santa Marta. His homily was inspired by passages from the Book of Samuel regarding the events in the life of King David, the “holy King David”, the central character of the day’s liturgy.

In the First Reading, after seeing that the Lord had “rejected Saul because he had a closed heart”, and had considered another king because of the people’s failure to obey him, the First Book of Samuel (16:1-13) presents the account of how King David “was chosen”. God says to Samuel: “How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him? Let us go and seek another. Fill your horn with oil, and go”. The Prophet tries to resist his fear of Saul’s vengeance, but the Lord encourages him to be “astute” and to feign a simple act of worship, a sacrifice. The Lord says to him: “take a heifer and go”.

Here begins the story, the Pontiff explained, of the “first step in the life of King David: his selection”. Scripture then tells of Jesse who “presents his sons” and of Samuel who, looking on the first says: “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him”. Indeed, he saw before him, Francis underlined, “a capable man”. But the Lord says to Samuel: “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”. Here then is the first lesson:

“We are so often slaves to appearances, slaves to the appearance of things, and we allow ourselves to be led by these things: ‘This seems...’. But the Lord knows the truth”.

The narrative continues: “Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and the Lord chose none of them”. Then, Samuel asks Jesse if he has presented all his sons. Jesse reveals that, in reality, “there is one, the youngest, who hasn’t been counted, who is now tending the flock”. Again the contrast between truth and appearance, the Pontiff noted: “in the man’s eyes, this boy didn’t count”. Then, after Samuel sends for the boy, the Lord says to Samuel: “Arise, anoint him”. Even though he was “the youngest, the one who didn’t count in his father’s eyes”, it was “not because the father didn’t love him”, but because he thought: “Why would God choose this boy?”. He did not consider that “man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”. Thus, “Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward”. David’s whole life “was the life of a man anointed by the Lord, chosen by the Lord”.

One could ask: “So, did the Lord make him a saint?”. Francis responded sharply, “No. King David is the holy King David, this is true, but holy after a long life”. In fact he reaches a venerable age, but his life was “marked by many sins”. David was “a saint and a sinner”. He was “a man who was able to unite the kingdom, to bring forward the people of Israel” but was also a man who “had his temptations” and who committed sins. Actually, David “was also an assassin” who, “in order to cover up his lust, the sin of adultery”, ordered a man killed. David himself did this. So one would ask: “The holy King David killed?”. It’s true, but it’s also true that when God sent the prophet Nathan to “show this reality” to David who “was unaware of the violence he had ordered”, David “acknowledged, ‘I have sinned’, and asked forgiveness”.

This is how King David’s life “played out”, full of light and shadows. He suffered “his son’s betrayal in the flesh, but he never used God to win his own cause”.

As he outlined the figure of the saint and sinner, Francis recalled that in the “very difficult time of war”, when he had to “flee Jerusalem”, David had the strength to send the ark back: “No, Lord, let it stay there; I shall not use the Lord in my defence”. And again, when David encountered the man who called him a “man of blood” he stopped one of his own men who wanted to kill the man who insulted him, saying: “If he curses me it is because the Lord bid him to curse me”. In fact, “in his heart David felt: ‘I deserve it’, because he ordered it. ‘Let him alone. It may be that the Lord will look compassion upon my humiliation and will forgive me of more”. In his life David then knew “victory” and the great “magnanimity” that led him not to kill Saul even though he could. In sum, the Pontiff said, “is this the holy King David? Yes, the saint, chosen by the Lord, chosen by the People of God” was also a “great sinner, but a penitent sinner”. Francis then commented: “This man’s life moves me and makes me think about our own”. In fact, “we were all chosen by the Lord in Baptism, to be among his people, to be saints”. All of us “have been consecrated by the Lord, in this journey of holiness”, yet, the Pope concluded, reading the history of this man — a “journey

that he began as a boy and continued until he was an old man” — who did many good things and other things not so good. “I have come to think that in the Christian journey”, in the journey that the Lord calls us to make, “there are no saints without a past, nor sinners without a future”.