



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The only way

Monday, 18 April 2016

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 16, 22 April 2016)

The instructions for Christian life are quite simple. There is no need to go searching for advice: suffice it follow a voice, as sheep do with their shepherd. The image of Jesus the Good Shepherd was the focus of Pope Francis' homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday morning.

The liturgy of the day offered a sort of "echo of the readings" of the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which is called "Good Shepherd Sunday, in which Jesus presents himself as the 'Good Shepherd'". Commenting on this theme in the Gospel of John (10:1-10), the Pontiff highlighted "three realities" on which he chose "to reflect a bit: the door, the way, and the voice".

First the "door". The Gospel passage presents Jesus' words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber". This is the first image, Francis emphasized: "He is the door: the door by which to enter the sheepfold is Jesus. There is no other". It is worth noting, the Pope said, that Jesus always spoke to the people using "simple images". Indeed, "those people all knew what a shepherd's life was, because they saw it every day". Therefore those who heard him understood very well: "the sheepfold is entered only through the door". Those who would rather enter the fold "through the window or by some other means are criminals". The Gospel defines them as thieves or robbers.

Thus it is all very clear: "One cannot enter into eternal life through another way that is not the door,

that is, which is not Jesus". And, the Pontiff added, the Lord "is the door of our life — and not only of eternal life but also of our daily life". Thus, for example, any decision can be taken "in the name of Jesus, through the door of Jesus". Or, to use "simple language", one can take it by "smuggling". But the Lord "speaks clearly". The sheepfold is entered "only through the door, which is Jesus".

The Gospel of John continues, and the words of the Lord offer another important element: that of the "way". Indeed, we read that the gatekeeper opens the door to the shepherd, that "the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him".

Here, Francis offered a second key word: "way: following Jesus". This too involves everyday life: indeed, we speak of the "way of life, of everyday life", which "is following Jesus". Here too the instruction is clear: "Do not go astray!", the Pope advised. It is Jesus "who is the door through which we enter and through which we exit with him to follow the way of life". It is Jesus who "shows us the way". Thus, "those who follow Jesus do not go astray".

The direction is clear, but there are many occasions to go astray, so the Pontiff hypothesized a situation that might present itself: "Yes, Father, but things are difficult.... Many times I do not clearly see what to do.... They told me that there was a fortune teller and I went there; I went to a fortune teller and he read my cards...". The Pope's advice was immediate: "If you do this, you aren't following Jesus! You are following someone else, who gives you another, different way", because "there is no one else who can point the way".

This describes a problem that Jesus warned us about: "There will be others who will say: the way of the Messiah is this, this.... Do not listen! Do not listen to them. I am the way!". This, the Pope said, is certain: "If we follow him we are not mistaken".

Finally, the third word: "voice". The sheep follow Jesus "because they know his voice". The Pontiff expanded on the concept to prevent any misunderstanding: "Know the voice of Jesus! Do not imagine that I am speaking about an apparition, that Jesus will come and say to you: 'Do this'. No, no!". Someone might ask: "Father, how can I recognize Jesus' voice? And also protect myself from the voice of those who are not Jesus, who come in through the window, who are robbers, who destroy, who deceive?". Once again the recipe is simple, with three instructions. First of all, Francis suggested, "you will find Jesus' voice in the Beatitudes". Therefore, those who teach "a way contrary to the Beatitudes are those who have entered through the window: they are not Jesus!". Then, Jesus' voice can be recognized in those who "speak to us about the works of mercy. For example, in Chapter 25 of St Matthew". Thus, the Pope clarified, "if someone tells you what Jesus says there, it is the voice of Jesus". Last, the third indication: "you can recognize the voice of Jesus when they teach you to say 'Father', that is, when they teach you to pray the Our Father".

The Pontiff's conclusion: "Christian life is so simple! Jesus is the door. He leads us along the way and we recognize his voice in the Beatitudes, in the works of mercy and when he teaches us to say 'Father'". The Pope added a prayer: "that the Lord help us to understand this image of Jesus, this icon: the shepherd, who is the door, points the way and teaches us to hear his voice".