



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

A Christian's battery

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If a Christian succumbs to the temptation of a “mirror spirituality”, he is not fuelling his light with the “battery of prayer” and looks “only at himself”, without giving to others. He fails in his vocation and becomes like a lamp which does not illuminate and salt that has no flavour. Pope Francis stressed this point at Mass he celebrated on Tuesday morning in the Chapel of Santa Marta, reflecting on the famous analogy in the day’s Gospel passage, which emphasized the effectiveness of Jesus’ language, how he “always speaks with simple words” so that “everyone can understand his message”. The Pope highlighted that in the passage from Matthew (5:13-16) we find “a definition of a Christian: a Christian must be salt and light. Salt gives flavour, it preserves, and light shines”. It is an example that calls us to action, since “light is not meant to be hidden, because when it is hidden it is not even preserved: it is turned off”, and “neither is salt an object in a museum exhibit or a kitchen cabinet, because in the end it is ruined by moisture and loses its strength, its flavour”.

How then, “do we avoid that this light and salt should weaken?”, the Pope asked. In other words, “how does the Christian avoid becoming less, becoming weak, weak in his own vocation?”. An answer is found in another parable, that of “the 10 maidens (Mt 25:2): five were foolish and five were wise”. The wisdom and foolishness, Pope Francis explained, come from the fact “that some had brought the oil, so as not to miss [the Lord]”, while the others were “playing with the light” and “forgot”, and thus their lights were extinguished. Moreover, the Pope offered a concrete example: “even a light bulb, when it begins to weaken, tells us that we have to recharge the battery”.

The conclusion is nevertheless the same: “What is the oil of a Christian? What is the Christian’s battery that brings light? It is simply prayer”. The Pope elaborated on this point: “You can do so many things, so many works, even works of mercy, you can do many great things for the Church — a Catholic university, a college, a hospital... — and they might even build a monument to you as a benefactor of the Church”, but “if you do not pray” then none of this will bring light. “How many works”, the Pope said, “become dark due to a lack of light, a lack of prayer”. Prayer, the Pope explained, means “prayer of adoration to the Father, of praise to the Trinity, the prayer of thanksgiving, even prayer to ask things of the Lord”, but it must always be a “heartfelt prayer”. This is precisely “the oil, it is the battery which gives life to the light”.

Turning to the example of salt, Francis indicated “another Christian attitude”: in the same way that salt — so as not to become “something thrown away, stepped on, an object in a museum or forgotten in a closet” — needs to be used, so too Christians must “give” and “add flavour to the lives of others; add flavour to many things with the message of the Gospel”. A Christian ought not to “preserve himself” but instead “he is salt in order to give”. Jesus chooses his examples well, Pope Francis said: “both light and salt are for others, not for themselves”, in fact “light does not illuminate itself” and “salt does not flavour itself”. Someone might object, saying: “But if I give of myself, if I give my salt, and even my light, then it will end and I too will end up in the dark”. But there, the Pope clarified, “is where the power of God comes in, because a Christian is the salt given by God in baptism: it is the salt of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that comes into your soul; it is the light of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that comes into your soul”.

This gift continues to be given to you if you share it. “It never ends”. This is explained, for example, in Scripture with the scene that is narrated in the first reading (1 Kings 17:7-16) where Elijah tells the widow of Zarephath not to be afraid to finish the barley and oil: “Go and do as you have said”. He even asks, “first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth’”. In this case too, the Pope explained, “it is the Lord who works this miracle”.

Therefore, the Pope concluded, addressing every Christian: “Light up with your light, but defend yourself from the temptation of illuminating yourself”. “Mirror spirituality” is “a horrible thing”. He added: “Defend yourself from the temptation of attending to yourself. Be a light to illuminate, and be salt to flavour and preserve”. From your works, we read in Scripture, “they will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven”. In other words, Pope Francis explained, you need to “return” to He “who gave you the light and the salt”, and ask the Lord to help us in this: to always care for the light, and not hide it, but put it into action; to care for the salt, to give it, in a way that is fair and necessary, but to give it”. If the salt is spread it “increases”, and that light “illuminates many people”: these are “good Christian works”.

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