



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

No parking

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(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

The Christian, aware that “God does not disappoint”, must always have “open horizons” to hope. Even in the face of adversity, he must not remain “parked” or “lazy”, without the “desire to go forward”. In his reflection at Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 17 January, Pope Francis encouraged the faithful to “have courage”. He drew inspiration from the first reading of the day's liturgy, in which the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (6: 10-20) urges the faithful to “be strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope that lies before us”. In fact, the Pope said, that “if we wanted to give a headline to this passage we should say ‘have courage’”.

Thus, courage. In regard to courage Scripture calls “each one of you to demonstrate the same eagerness”, which, Pope Francis explained, “means the courage to go forward”. Indeed, “this eagerness”, he said, “will lead you to fulfilment until the end”. Moreover, Francis continued, courage “is a word Saint Paul really likes”. Thus, for example, when the Apostle reflects on a Christian's attitude towards life, “he tells us about the training those who want to win do in the stadium, in the gym”. And to do this, the Pope explained, it takes “courage, moving forward without shame”. This is why, the Pontiff added, “a courageous life is that of a Christian”.

But the Apostle to the Gentiles also writes something else: “that you may not become sluggish”.

That is, he also dwelt on the opposite behaviour: “laziness, not having courage”. By way of example, Pope Francis offered a concrete image taken from everyday life: “living in the fridge in this way, so that everything stays this way”. The reference therefore, is to “lazy Christians, the Christians who do not have the desire to go forward, Christians who do not struggle to do things that change, new things, things that would do us all good if these things were to change”.

Using another effective image, the Pope remarked on “parked Christians”, those who “have found a good parking place in the Church. And when I say ‘Christians’, I say the laity, priests, bishops ... everyone”. And, unfortunately, “there are parked Christians! For them the Church is a parking lot that safeguards life and they go forward with all possible guarantees”.

“These idle Christians” reminded the Pope of “something that our grandparents would say to us” when he was a boy: “Be careful of still water, the kind that does not flow; it is the first to go bad”. And those who “do not struggle”, who “live in the security they think religion gives them”, end up just like that. On the contrary, both Saint Paul and the Pontiff invite Christians to “be courageous”! This is why we read in the Bible passage, we are “strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope” that makes us “courageous Christians rather than lazy”.

The Pope explained: “Lazy Christians have no hope, are closed there. They have all the advantages. They don’t have to struggle. They’ve retired”. Now, while it is true that “after many years of work, it is right to retire; it is nice too”, it is also true that “spending all your life in retirement is bad”. And “lazy Christians are like that. Why? Because they have no hope”.

This then, is the message proposed by the liturgy: “hope, that hope which does not disappoint, that goes beyond”. Citing the passage, the Pope said this hope is “an anchor of the soul, sure and firm”. Indeed, “hope is the anchor: we have cast it and we are clinging to the rope”, he added. But not to stay still: “hope is struggling, clinging to the rope, to get there”. And “in the everyday struggle”, hope “is a virtue of horizons, not of closure”. Perhaps, added Francis, hope “is the least understood virtue, but the strongest”, because it allows us to live “always looking ahead with courage”.

Some, the Pope observed, might object to this : “Yes, Father, but there are bad times, where everything seems dark, what should I do?”. The answer is: “Hold on to the rope and endure”. We have to be aware that “life is not [just] given to any of us: we must struggle to have life or endure. Not surprisingly, stressed the Pontiff, “courage” and “endure” are two words “Paul uses quite a lot in his letters”.

Christians must be “courageous”, with the “courage to go forward”. It is true, Francis admitted , that “Christians often make mistakes; but who has promised you that in your life, you will never make mistakes? We all make mistakes. He who goes forth makes mistakes, he who walks; the one who stands still seems to do no wrong”. So in addition to courage, the Christian also needs

the ability to endure: when you “cannot walk because everything is dark, everything is closed, endure”. It is this constancy through which, it is written, we become “heirs of the promises”. It is “constancy through bad times”.

For this reason, the Pope invited everyone to make an examination of conscience and to ask themselves: “Am I a parked Christian — lazy — or a courageous Christian? Am I a Christian who wants all the guarantees or am I a Christian who takes risks? Am I a closed Christian or a Christian of horizons, of hope?”. And again: “How is my hope? Is my heart anchored in the horizon, am I clinging to the rope, and do I believe even in bad times? And in bad times, am I able to endure because I know that God does not disappoint; do I know that hope does not disappoint?”.

It is, ultimately, a deeper question, namely: “How am I? How is my life of faith? Is it a life of horizons, of hope and of courage, of moving forward, or a lukewarm life that can’t even endure the bad times”?

Let us pray to the Lord, the Pope concluded, to “give us the grace to overcome our selfishness because parked Christians, Christians standing still, are selfish. They look at themselves; they don’t know to raise their head to look at Him”.