



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A day for listening

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Among the many special days which are celebrated for the most diverse reasons, it would be useful to dedicate one as a “day for listening”. Immersed as we are in “confusion”, in words, in rushing about, in our selfishness, in “worldliness”, we risk becoming “deaf to God’s Word”, “hardening” our hearts, and “losing faithfulness” to the Lord. It is essential that we “stop” and “listen”.

Pope Francis made this suggestion during his homily on Thursday morning, 23 March. Commenting on the day’s readings, he said: “half-way through Lent on this journey toward Easter, the Church’s message today is very simple: ‘Stop. Stop for a moment’”. So, he asked, “why should we stop?”. The response is found in the refrain of the Responsorial Psalm (95[94]): “Oh that today you would hearken His voice! Harden not your hearts”. Therefore, “stop in order to listen”, Francis stressed.

The Holy Father then turned to the day’s reading from the Prophet Jeremiah (7:23-28), in which God speaks of the “tragedy of that people who did not want, did not know how to listen: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people’”. The Lord’s invitation is clear: “walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you”. Pope Francis explained that it was

as if the Lord had told his people: “The things I will tell you are for your happiness. Do not be foolish. Believe in this. Stop, listen”. This advice fell on deaf ears, the Pontiff continued, so much so that “the Lord complains a bit; it is the lament of a grieving father”, as if He were to say: “But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward”.

Francis then brought the Bible narrative into the context of mankind’s condition today: “When we do not stop to listen to the voice of the Lord, we end up becoming distant from him; we turn our backs”, Francis explained, adding that this attitude has some consequences: “If we do not listen to the Lord’s voice, but listen to other voices; if we often close our ears, we become deaf, deaf to God’s Word”. No one is excluded from this situation. “If we all stop and look into our hearts today, we would see how many times — how many! — we have closed our ears and how many times we have become deaf”, Francis said.

And what does this deafness mean? “When a people, a community, but let us say, even a Christian community, a parish, a diocese closes its ears and becomes deaf to the Word of God, it seeks other voices, other lords, and it ends up involving idols, the idols which the world, worldliness, and society offer”, he explained. We become distant “from the living God”, the Pontiff stressed.

However, this is not the only consequence, he continued, because “turning our backs hardens our hearts. And when we do not listen, the heart becomes harder, more closed within itself, hard and incapable of receiving anything”. The result is “not just closing off” but also “hardness of heart”. Under these circumstances man “lives in that world, in that atmosphere that is not good for him”, a reality which “distances him from the Lord, more and more each day”.

It is a negative process which leads to “not listening to the Word of God”, to distancing oneself, and thus, to a “hardened heart, closed within itself”, to the point that it loses “the sense of faithfulness”. In the passage from Jeremiah, the Lord laments the fact that, “Truth has perished”. The very same can be said of life today, Francis cautioned, adding that we risk becoming “unfaithful’ Catholics, ‘pagan’ Catholics, or even worse, ‘atheist’ Catholics, because we have no loving reference to the Living God”. This “not listening and turning our backs ... hardens our hearts”, the Pope reiterated, and leads mankind “on the path of unfaithfulness”.

Our unfaithfulness creates an interior void, the Pope observed. “How is this filled?”, he asked. “With confusion ... we do not know where God is, and where he is not”. Indeed, Francis said, “we confuse God with the devil”. This is precisely the situation described in the Gospel passage in which Luke tells the story of “Jesus who performs miracles, who does many things for salvation and the people are pleased” (11:14-23). But he is accused by some: “He does this because he is a son of the devil. He does the will of Beelzebub”. This, Francis stressed, is “blasphemy. Blasphemy is the final word in this journey which begins with not listening, which hardens the heart, which

leads you to confusion, makes you forget faithfulness, and in the end, you commit blasphemy". Thus, "woe to the people who forget that marvel, the marvel of the first encounter with Jesus", Pope Francis said, echoing the words in the Gospel which described the marvel of the crowds, the marvel which "opens the door to the Word of God".

The Pontiff concluded his homily by calling everyone to a serious examination of conscience. "Each of us today can ask him- or herself: 'Do I stop to listen to the Word of God? Do I take the Bible in my hands and is He talking to me?'; and, 'has my heart become hardened? Have I distanced myself from the Lord? Have I lost my faithfulness to the Lord and do I live with the idols that everyday worldliness offers? Have I lost the joy of the marvel of the first encounter with Jesus?'".

Thus, "today is a day for listening", the Pope observed. "Listen today to our Lord's voice", and "do not harden your heart". Indeed, he said, "let us ask for this grace: the grace to listen so that our hearts may not harden".