



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The God of surprises

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the day's Readings from the first Book of Samuel (15:16-23) and the Gospel of St Mark (2:18-22). The Holy Father began by noting that both readings help us "to reflect on the word of God" and "on our attitude towards God's word". Citing Hebrews, the Pope said that the word of God is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword ... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12-13). Indeed, he said, "the word of God visits us and illumines the state of our heart, of our soul"; it "discerns".

Pope Francis noted that the two readings "speak to us about the disposition we should have in the presence of the word of God"; i.e., "docility". "Docile to the word of God. The word of God is living. And therefore it comes and says what it wants to say: not what I expect it to say or what I hope it will say or what I want it to say". The word of God "is free" and it comes as "a surprise, since our God is the God of surprises: he comes and always does new things. He is newness. The Gospel is newness. Revelation is newness".

"Our God," the Pope continued, "is a God who always does new things. And he asks from us docility to this newness". In the Gospel passage, Pope Francis said, "Jesus is clear about this, he is very clear: new wine in fresh wine skins". Thus, "God must be received with openness to what is new". And this disposition "is called docility".

The Pontiff therefore invited those present to ask themselves these questions: “Am I docile to the word of God, or do I always do what I believe the word of God is? Or do I make the word of God pass through an alembic and in the end it is something quite other than what God wants?”. “If I do this,” the Pope warned, citing the Gospel, “I am like a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment”. “And the tear is made worse: if I do this, I become worse”.

Yet, as the Holy Father explained, “adapting oneself to the word of God to be able to receive it” requires “an ascetic attitude”. He gave the example of an electric appliance. If it doesn’t work, one sometimes needs an adaptor. The same is true for us: we always need to adapt ourselves, to adjust ourselves to the newness of God’s word”. Essentially, he said, we need “to be open to new things”.

In his reflection, the Pope then turned to the passage from the first Book of Samuel. “Saul, God’s chosen one, God’s anointed, had forgotten that God is surprise and newness. He had forgotten it. He was enclosed in his thoughts and plans. And so he reasoned in a human way. The Lord said to him: utterly destroy all that they have”. However, as the Pope explained, the custom “whenever anyone conquered, was to take the spoils” to divide them; “and a part of the spoils was used to offer sacrifice”. Saul had therefore selected several beautiful animals for the Lord: “he reasoned according to his own thoughts, according to his heart, enclosed in his habits. And God, our God, is not a God of habits, he is a God of surprises”.

Thus Saul “did not obey God’s word, he was not docile to God’s word”. We read in the Scripture that Samuel “reproved him” for this, saying: “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?” Samuel “makes him feel that he hasn’t obeyed: he has not been a servant, he has been lord. He has set himself up as master of God’s word. Indeed, Samuel then also says: “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”.

“The word of God continues forward through Samuel,” the Pope added: “rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness the sin of idolatry” (v. 23).

Samuel’s words “make us think about the nature of Christian freedom, about the nature of Christian obedience”. “Christian freedom and Christian obedience consist in being docile to the word of God; in having the courage to become fresh skins for this new wine ... the courage to discern always, to discern ... what the spirit is doing in my heart, what the spirit wants in my heart, where the spirit is leading me in my heart; and to obey”.

Pope Francis concluded his homily by repeating the two key words of the day: “to discern and to obey”. And he prayed: “Let us ask for the grace of docility to God’s word, to this word that is living and active, that discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart”.
