



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Christians without masks

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis reflected on the meaning of Lent in light of the day's readings from Isaiah (1:10, 16-20) and the Gospel of Matthew (23:1-12).

"Lent is a time for us to draw closer to the Lord," the Pope said. It is a time for "conversion". In the day's first Reading, he said, "the Lord invites us to conversion; and interestingly he calls two cities harlots": Sodom and Gomorrah. And he issues them this invitation: "Be converted, change your lives, draw near to the Lord". This, he explained, "is the Lenten invitation: they are 40 days to draw near to the Lord, to be closer to him. For we all need to change our lives".

The Pontiff noted how meaningless it is to excuse ourselves by saying: "But Father, I am not such a great sinner....", for "we all have something inside of us and if we look into our soul we will find something that is not good, all of us". Lent therefore "invites us to amend our lives, to put them in order", he said, adding that this is precisely what allows us to draw near to the Lord, who is always ready to forgive.

Pope Francis then quoted the word of the Lord, spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow". With these words the Lord says to us: "I will change your soul", the Pope said. What does he ask of us? To draw near. To draw near to him. He is a Father; he awaits us in order to forgive us.

The Lord also gives us this counsel: “Do not be like the hypocrites”. Citing the day’s Gospel from St Matthew, the Pope continued: “The Lord does not want this [hypocritical] type of drawing near. He wants us to draw near in sincerity and truth. What do hypocrites do? They mask themselves. They mask themselves as good. They mask their faces like a holy picture: they pray looking up to heaven to make themselves seen, they feel that they are more righteous than others, they look down on others”. And they boast of being good Catholics because they have acquaintances among benefactors, bishops and cardinals.

“This is hypocrisy,” he said. “And the Lord says no to it”. No one should feel self righteous. “We all need to be justified and the only one who justifies us is Jesus Christ. That is why we need to draw near: to avoid being masked Christians”. When appearances vanish “reality comes to light and we see that they are not Christians. What is the touchstone? The Lord himself tells us in the first Reading: ‘Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good’”. This, he repeated, is the Lenten invitation.

“What is the sign that we are on the right path?”, the Pope asked. “Scripture tells us: defend the oppressed; take care of your neighbour, the sick, the poor, the needy, the ignorant. This is the touchstone. Hypocrites cannot do this, for they are so full of themselves that they are blind to seeing others”. But “when one journeys a little and draws near to the Lord, the light of the Father enables one to see these things and to go out to help one’s brothers and sisters. And this is the sign of conversion”.

Certainly, he added, this “is not the whole of conversion; because conversion is an encounter with Jesus Christ. But this is the sign that we are with Jesus: taking care of the brethren, the poorest and the sick, as the Lord teaches us in the Gospel”.

Lent therefore helps us “to change our lives, to amend our lives, to draw near to the Lord”, the Pope reiterated. Hypocrisy, by contrast, is “the sign that we are far from the Lord”. The hypocrite “saves himself on his own, at least this is what he thinks”, whereas “the sign that we have drawn near to the Lord in a spirit of repentance and forgiveness “is that we take care of our needy brothers and sisters”.

Pope Francis concluded his homily, praying: “May the Lord give us all light and courage: light to be aware of what is happening within us; and courage to be converted, to draw near to the Lord. It is beautiful to be close to the Lord”.

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