



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Marginalized and therefore saved

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis delivered a powerful reflection on the virtue of humility, based on the day's Readings from 2 Kings (5:1-15a) and the Gospel of Luke (4:24-30). The Pope began by noting Jesus' statement that he was unable to work miracles in Nazareth "because of the lack of faith". "They did not have faith" where the Lord was raised. Jesus in fact states that "no prophet is acceptable in his own country". He then recalls the story of Naaman the Syrian and the prophet Elisha that is recounted in the day's first Reading, and that of the widow in Sidon with the prophet Elisha.

"The lepers and widows of that time were marginalized", the Pope emphasized. "The widows who lived on public charity had no place in the normal spheres of society", while the lepers had to live outside society, far from the people.

Thus, the Pope continued: in the Synagogue in Nazareth, "Jesus says that there shall be no miracle: no prophet is accepted here because you have no need of one, you are too self-assured". The people whom Jesus had before him "were so secure in their supposed 'faith', they were so secure in their observance of the commandments, that they had no need of any other form of salvation". This inner attitude, the Pope explained, reveals "the tragedy of observing the commandments without faith: I am saved only because I go to Synagogue every Sabbath, and because I seek to obey the commandments"; and "who is this to come and tell me that those who

are marginalized, the leper and the widow, are better than I”.

Yet the Pope summarized Jesus’ words in this way: “Take care because if you do not feel that you are on the margins, you will not be saved!”. And he added: “this is humility, the path of humility: to feel so marginalized” that one “feels one’s need for the Lord’s salvation” for “it is he alone who saves and not our observance of the precepts”.

Yet, as the Pope observed, Jesus’ teaching was received with such displeasure by the people of Nazareth that “they became enraged and wanted to kill him”. It is the same anger that Naaman the Syrian exhibited in today’s first Reading from the Old Testament. In order to be healed of his leprosy, Naaman “goes to the king with many gifts, with great riches: he feels secure, he is the head of the army”. However, the prophet Elisha invites him to humble himself and to “wash in the river Jordan seven times”. An invitation which must have seemed “a bit ridiculous” to him, the Pope said. Indeed, Naaman “felt humiliated, and was angry and went away”, just like “those from the Synagogue in Nazareth”. In fact, the Scriptures use the same verb to describe both responses: they became “indignant”.

Naaman was asked to perform “an act of humility, of obedience, like a child: to do the ridiculous!”. But he reacts with indignation: “are not the Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all waters, and I am supposed to wash in this little stream? Something isn’t right here!”. Yet those who were with him, who had good sense, “helped him to place himself on the margins, to humble himself”. And Naaman comes out of the river Jordan healed of his leprosy.

“This is today’s message in this third week of Lent,” the Pope said. “If we wish to be saved, we must choose the path of humility, and of humiliation”. Mary is our greatest witness, Pope Francis said, for “in her canticle, she does not say that she rejoices because God has looked upon her virginity, her goodness, her sweetness, on the many virtues which she possessed”. Rather, she exults “because God has regarded the humility of his handmaiden, her littleness”. For “it is humility which the Lord regards with pleasure”.

“We must also learn the wisdom of placing ourselves on the margins so that the Lord will find us”, the Pope continued. “The Lord will not find us at the centre of our self- assurance. No, there the Lord does not go! He will find us on the margins, in our sins, in our mistakes, in our need to be healed spiritually, in our need to be saved. It is there that the Lord will find us”.

This “is the road of humility”, the Pope said. “Christian humility is not a virtue” which leads us to say “I am not needed”, and which thus masks a “hidden pride”. Rather, “Christian humility prompts us to speak the truth and to say: I am a sinner!”. Essentially, he said, it is a matter of “speaking the truth, and this is our truth”. Yet there is also “another truth ... the truth that God saves us! However, he saves us when we are marginalized. He does not save us in our self-assurance”.

Pope Francis concluded his homily in prayer, asking that God might “grant us the grace to marginalize ourselves; the grace of humility to receive the Lord’s salvation”.