



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Those who scandalize the people

Friday, 21 November 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 48, 28 November 2014)

Priests and lay people with pastoral responsibility must “keep the temple clean” and “welcome every person as Mary did”, taking care not “to cause scandal for the People of God” and to avoid turning the Church into a money exchange, “because salvation is free”. This was the Pope’s recommendation on Friday morning, the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, during Mass at Santa Marta.

Speaking from the day’s Reading taken from the Gospel according to Luke, 19:45-48, Pope Francis said that in the temple, Jesus’ act of “driving out the vendors”, is actually “a ceremony of purification of the temple”. The people of Israel “knew these ceremonies” because “they had to purify the temple after it had been profaned”. Just think “of the temples of Nehemiah in the reconstruction of the temple”, the Pope said. There was “always that zeal for the House of God, for the temple, for them, was ‘the sacred’, and when it was desecrated it had to be purified”.

Thus, “in this moment, Jesus is performing a purification ceremony”, the Pope repeated. He then confided: “I was thinking today about how this Jesus, zealous of the glory of God, lash in hand, differs from the 12-year-old Jesus who conversed with the elders: how much time has passed and how much has changed!”. In fact, “Jesus, moved by zeal for the glory of the Father, performs this

ceremony of purification — the temple had been desecrated”; not only the temple, however, but also “the People of God, who have been profaned by a sin so serious as scandal”.

Referring again to the Gospel, Francis remarked that “the people are good, they went to temple, they weren’t looking at these things. They were looking for God, they were praying”. It was necessary, however, to “change currency in order to make the offering, and they did it there”. It was actually to search for God that “the People of God went to temple; not so for the vendors”. From them “came the corruption that scandalized the people”.

The Pope recalled, in this regard, “a really beautiful scene of the Bible”, which is also connected with the presentation of Mary: “When Samuel’s mother went to the temple, she prayed for the grace of a son. She quietly whispered her prayers. The poor, old, but very corrupt priest” called her “a drunkard”. At that time, “the priest’s two son’s exploited the people, exploited the pilgrims, scandalized the people: the sin of scandal”. The woman, however, “with such humility, instead of saying a few harsh words to this priest, explained her anguish”. Thus, “in the midst of corruption, in that moment”, there was “the holiness and humility of the People of God”.

Let’s consider, the Pontiff continued, “those people who were watching Jesus clean house with a lash. Luke writes: “all the people hung upon his words”. In light of this gesture of Jesus, “I think of the scandal that we can cause for people with our conduct, with our unpriestly habits in the temple: the scandal of trade, the scandal of worldliness”. Indeed, “how often, even today, do we see there as we enter a Church, there’s a price list: Baptism, so much; blessing, so much, Mass intentions, so much...”. People are scandalized by this.

The Pope also told about an event that he experienced personally. “Once, newly ordained, I was with a group from the university and a couple who wanted to get married”. They went to a parish to arrange the wedding mass. “And the parish secretary there, said: No, no, you can’t”. And they asked why they couldn’t have a wedding mass, since a Mass was always recommended in order to marry. “No, it’s not possible, because you can’t take more than 20 minutes”. Why? “Because there are time slots — But we want a Mass! — Then pay for two slots!” So, “in order to marry with a Mass they had to pay twice”. This, the Pope said, “is a scandal”. And we know “what Jesus says to those who cause scandal: it would be better to be cast into the sea”.

It’s a fact: “when those who are in the temple — whether priests, lay people, secretaries who manage pastoral care in the temple — become profiteers, the people will be scandalized”. And all of us, the laity as well, are responsible for this. Because, Francis explained, “if I see see this going on in my parish, I have to have the courage to speak to the priest’s face”, otherwise, “the people suffer that scandal”. And it’s curious, the Pope added, that “the People of God lose their priests, when they have a weakness, slipping on a sin”. However, “there are two things that the People of God cannot forgive: a priest attached to money and a priest who mistreats people”. The scandal of a “house of God” that becomes a “house of trade” is hard to forgive. This is exactly what happened

with regard to “that wedding: the Church was for rent” in shifts.

In the Gospel, Luke doesn’t say that “Jesus is angry”, but rather that Jesus has “zeal for the house of God”, which “is more than anger”. But, the Pontiff asked, “why does Jesus act this way? He had said and he expresses here: we cannot serve two masters. Either serve the living God or serve money”. In this instance, “the house of the living God is a house of trade: the worship was actually of money”. Jesus says instead: “It is written: ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers”. Thus, “He clearly distinguishes the two things”.

But there is also another question: “why does Jesus have an issue with money?”. Because, Francis answered, “redemption is free: God’s gratuitousness”. Indeed, Jesus “comes to bring us the full gratuitousness of the love of God”. This is why, “when the Church or the Churches become profiteers, it’s said that salvation isn’t so free”. It is for this very reason that “Jesus takes the lash in hand to do this rite of purification in the temple”.

The liturgical Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple reminds the Pontiff of a prayer. Recalling that the Virgin enters the temple as a “simple woman”, Francis hoped that this would “teach all of us, all priests, all those who have pastoral responsibility — to keep the temple clean” and to “lovingly welcome those who come, as Our Lady did”.