



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

As martyrs

Tuesday, 17 February 2015

The Holy Father offered Mass at Santa Marta for the 21 Copts killed in Libya

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 8, 20 February 2015)

“We offer this Mass for our 21 Coptic brothers, slaughtered for the sole reason that they were Christians”. These were Pope Francis’ words during the Mass celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 17 February. “Let us pray for them, that the Lord welcome them as martyrs, for their families, for my brother Tawadros, who is suffering greatly”, he added. In a telephone conversation on Monday afternoon, Pope Francis spoke personally with Tawadrosii, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He expressed his profound sadness for the barbaric assassination carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, and assured him of his prayers for the funerals.

Pope Francis opened his homily with the words of the entrance antiphon, “Be my protector, O God, a mighty stronghold to save me. For you are my rock, my stronghold! Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name” (cf. Ps 31[30]:3-4). He continued with the passage on the flood in the day’s Reading from the Book of Genesis (6:5-8, 7:1-5, 10) which, he said, “makes us think about man’s capacity for destruction: man is capable of destroying everything that God made” when “he thinks he is more powerful than God”. Thus, “God can make good things, but man is capable of destroying them all”.

Even starting from the beginning “in the first chapters of the Bible, we find many examples”. For example, Francis explained, “man summons the flood through his wickedness: it is he who summons it!”. Moreover, “man summons the fire out of heaven, to Sodom and Gomorrah, out of his wickedness”. Then, “man creates confusion, the division of humanity — Babel, the Tower of Babel — with his wickedness”. In other words, “man is capable of destruction, we are all capable of destruction”. This is confirmed again in Genesis with “a very, very sharp phrase: ‘This wickedness was great and every innermost intent of their heart — in the heart of mankind — was nothing but evil, always’”.

It isn’t a question of being too negative, the Pope pointed out, because “this is the truth”. At this point “we are even capable of destroying fraternity”, as demonstrated by the story of “Cain and Abel in the first pages of the Bible”. This episode which “destroys fraternity, is the beginning of wars: jealousy, envy, such greed for power, to have more power”. Yes, Francis confirmed, “this seems negative, but it is realistic”. After all, he added, one need only pick up a newspaper to see “that more than 90 percent of the news is about destruction: more than 90 percent! And we see this every day!”.

Thus the fundamental question: “what happens in the heart of man?”, the Pope asked. “Jesus once warned his disciples that evil does not enter a man’s heart because he eats something that isn’t pure, but rather, it comes out of the heart”. And “all wickedness comes out of the heart of man”. Indeed, “our weak heart is wounded”. There is “always that desire for autonomy” which leads one to say: “I do what I want, and if I want to do this, I do it! And if I want to make war over this, I do it! And if I want to destroy my family over this, I do it! And if I want to kill my neighbour over this, I do it”. But this is really “everyday news”, the Pope remarked, observing that “newspapers don’t tell us news about the life of saints”.

Therefore, he continued, returning to the central question: “why are we like this?”. And the answer: “Because we have the opportunity to destroy: this is the problem!”. And in doing so, “with war, with arms trafficking, we are entrepreneurs of death!”. And “there are countries that sell arms to this one that is at war with that one, and they also sell them to that one, so that war continues”. The problem is precisely the “capacity for destruction and this does not come from our neighbour” but “from us!”.

“Every innermost intent of the heart is nothing but evil”, Francis again repeated. And “we have this seed inside, this possibility”. But “we also have the Holy Spirit who saves us”. It is thus a matter of choosing to start with the “little things”. And so, “when a woman goes to the market and finds another, starts to gossip, to speak ill of her neighbour, about that woman over there: this woman kills, this woman is evil”. And this happens “at the market” but also “in the parish, in associations, when there is jealousy, the envious ones go to the priest to say ‘this one no, this one yes, this one does...’”. And this too “is evil, the capacity to destroy, which all of us have”.

This is the point on which “today the Church, on the threshold of Lent, causes us to reflect”. The Pope’s reflection in this regard started from the Gospel of Mark (8:14-21). “In the Gospel, Jesus lightly reprimands the disciples who were arguing: ‘you were supposed to bring the bread — no, you were!’”. Basically the Twelve “were discussing as usual, were arguing amongst themselves”. And Jesus says something beautiful to them “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”. Thus, “He simply makes an example of two people: Herod is bad, he is an assassin, and the Pharisees hypocrites”. But the Lord also speaks of “‘leaven’ and they do not understand”.

The fact is, as Mark writes, the disciples “were speaking about bread, about this bread, and Jesus tells them: ‘that leaven is dangerous, what we have inside is what leads us to destroy. Take heed, beware!’”. Then “Jesus shows the other door: ‘Are your hearts hardened? Do you not remember when I broke the five loaves, the door of God’s salvation?’”. In fact, “nothing good ever comes from arguing”, he said, “there will always be division, destruction!”. He continued: “Think about salvation, about what God too did for us, and make the right choice!”. But the disciples “did not understand because their hearts were hardened by this passion, by this wickedness of arguing amongst themselves to see who was to blame for forgetting the bread”.

Francis then advised that “this message of the Lord” should be taken seriously, because “this isn’t something strange, this isn’t a Martian talking, no: these are things that happen in everyday life”. And to confirm this, he repeated, we only need to pick up “the newspaper, nothing more!”.

However, he added, “man is capable of doing such good: let’s consider Mother Teresa, for example, a woman of our era”. But if “all of us are capable of doing such good” we are “also capable of destroying in great and small measure, in the same family: of destroying the children, not letting the children grow freely, not helping them to grow well” and thus in some way nullifying the children. “We have this capacity and this is the reason constant meditation, prayer, discussion among ourselves is necessary, to avoid falling into this wickedness which destroys everything”.

And “we have the strength” to do it, as “Jesus reminds us”, and “today He tells us: Remember. Remember me, who spilled my blood for you; remember me, who saved you, who save everyone; remember me, who has the power to accompany you on the journey of life, not on the road of evil, but on the path of goodness, of doing good for others; not on the path of destruction, but on the path of building: building a family, building a city, building a culture, building a homeland, always more!”.

With today’s reflection, Francis asked the Lord, for the grace to “always choose the right path with his help and not to let ourselves be deceived by the seduction that will lead us down the wrong path” before Lent begins.

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