



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Don't close that door

Tuesday, 17 March 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 12, 20 March 2015)

Lent is a propitious time “for each of us and for the whole Church” to ask the Lord for “conversion to the mercy of Jesus”. Too often, in fact, Christians “are experts at closing the door to people” who, worn down by life and by their mistakes, would instead be ready for a new start, “people whose hearts the Holy Spirit stirs to move forward”.

During Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, the law of love was at the core of Pope Francis’ reflection, which began from the Day’s Liturgy of the Word. It began with an image: “water which is made fresh”. In the First Reading the Prophet Ezekiel (47:1-9, 12) talks about water flowing from the temple, “holy water, the water of God, as abundant as the grace of God: ever abundant”. The Lord, the Pope explained, is indeed generous “in giving his love, in healing our wounds”.

Water returns in the Gospel according to John (5:1-16), with the image of a pool — “in Hebrew it was called Bethesda” — which had “five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled”. In this place there was, in fact, a tradition according to which “from time to time an angel came down” to stir up the waters, and the sick “who jumped in” at that moment “would be healed”.

Therefore, the Pontiff explained, “there were a lot of people”. And that is also why “a man who had been ill for 38 years” was there. He was there, waiting, and Jesus asked him: “Do you want to be well?”. The sick man replied: “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, when the angel comes. While I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me”. In other words, Jesus is presented with “a defeated man” who “had lost hope”. A sick man, “not just paralyzed”, Francis pointed out, but afflicted with “another, much worse disease”, sloth.

“Sloth made him sad, lazy”, the Pope noted. Another person would have “found a way to get there in time, like the blind man in Jericho who shouted and shouted, and they wanted to silence him but he shouted even louder: he found a way”. But this man, overcome by 38 years of illness, “didn’t want to be healed”, didn’t have the strength. At the same time, he had a “bitterness of spirit: ‘Someone else gets there before me and I am left aside’. He also had “a little resentment”. He was “really a sad soul, defeated, defeated by life”.

However, “Jesus has mercy” for this man and says to him: “Rise! Get up, let’s put an end to this; take up your mat, and walk”. Francis then described the following scene: “The man was immediately healed and took up his mat and walked, but he was so sick that he couldn’t believe it, and perhaps he walked somewhat hesitantly with his mat on his shoulders”. At this point other characters come into play: “It is the sabbath and what does this man find? The doctors of the law”, who ask him: “Why are you carrying this? You can’t, today is the sabbath”. The man responds: “Well, you know, I’ve been healed!”. Then he adds: “The man who made me well told me: ‘take up your mat’”.

Thus a curious thing happened: “the people, instead of rejoicing, of saying: “How beautiful! Well done!”, wonder: “Who is this man?”. The experts, in other words, begin to investigate and discuss: “Let’s see what has happened here, the law.... We need to defend the law”. The man, for his part, continues to walk with his mat, “but a little sadly”. The Pope commented: “I’m bad, but sometimes I think of what would have happened had this man given a nice cheque to those doctors. They might have said: ‘Go ahead, yes, yes, this time go ahead!’”.

Further in the Gospel Reading, Jesus “finds this man again and says to him: “Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you. Go ahead, keep going”. And that man goes to the doctors of the law to say: “The person, the man who made me well is called Jesus. He’s the one”. We also read that this is why “the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath”. Again, Francis said, it was “because he did good even on the sabbath, and you couldn’t do that”.

This story, the Pope said, bringing his reflection into the present time, it “happens often in life: a man — a woman — who feels sick in spirit, sad, who has made many mistakes in life, at a certain point feels the water stirring”. It is “the Holy spirit who moves something”. Or the person “hears a word” and reacts: “I want to go!”. Thus “they find courage and go”. But “how often today in

Christian communities” does that man “find the doors closed”. Perhaps he hears: “You cannot, no you cannot; you’ve made mistakes here and you cannot. If you want to come, come to Mass on Sunday, but stop there, don’t do anything more”. Thus it happens that “what the Holy Spirit does in people’s hearts, Christians destroy with the psychology of the doctors of the law”.

The Pontiff said he was unhappy about this, because, he highlighted, the Church “is Jesus’ house and Jesus welcomes, but not only does He welcome: He goes to find people”, just as “He went to find” that man. “And if the people are wounded”, the Pope asked, “what does Jesus do? Does He rebuke them for being wounded? No, He comes and carries them on his shoulders”. This, the Pope stated, “is called mercy”. God speaks of this when “He rebukes his people: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’”.

In his usual fashion, the Pope ended his reflection with a practical suggestion for daily life: “It is Lent, we must repent”. One might say: “Father, there are so many sinners on the street: those who steal, those in the Rom camps...”, for example, “and we despise these people”. But such a person should be told: “And you? Who are you? Who are you, who close the door of your heart to a man, to a woman who wants to improve, to rejoin the People of God, because the Holy Spirit has stirred his or her heart?”. Even today there are Christians who behave like the doctors of the law and “do the same thing they did with Jesus”, by objecting: “This one speaks heresy, this one cannot, this one goes against the discipline of the Church, this one goes against the law”. And thus they close the doors to so many people. He concluded, “let us ask the Lord today” for “conversion to the mercy of Jesus”: only in this way “will the law be fulfilled, because the law is to love God and neighbour, as ourselves”.