



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Obedience

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Prayers for Benedict XVI on his birthday

Francis offered Mass for Benedict XVI on his 88th birthday, inviting those present to join in praying “that the Lord sustain him and grant him much joy and happiness”.

In his homily, the Pontiff spoke of obedience, a prominent theme in the day’s liturgy. He began by quoting words from the end of the passage from the Gospel according to John (3:36): “he who does not obey the Son shall not see life”. Then, referring to the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (5:27-33), the Pontiff also recalled what “the Apostles said to the high priests: we must obey God rather than men”.

Obedience, Francis explained, “often leads us down a path which isn’t the one we think it should be: there is another, the obedience of Jesus who says to the Father in the Mount of Olives: “Thy will be done”. In so doing Jesus “obeys and saves us all”. Thus, we must be ready to “obey, to have the courage to change directions when the Lord asks this of us”. And “for this reason, he who obeys will have eternal life”, whereas for “he who does not obey, the wrath of God rests upon him”.

“Within this framework”, the Pontiff said, “we can reflect upon the First Reading” — more specifically on the “dialogue between the Apostles and the high priests”. The “story began a bit earlier” in the same chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Thus, he summarized, “the Apostles preached to the people and would stand at Solomon’s Portico. The whole populace would go there to hear them: they worked miracles and the number of believers was growing”. But “a small group wouldn’t dare join them, out fear, they were distant”. Yet, the Pope said, “even from nearby places, from nearby villages, they brought the sick to the squares, on pallets, so that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them and would heal them. And they were healed”.

However, the narrative of the Acts continues, “the priests and the people’s leaders became angry”: indeed, they were “filled with jealousy because the people were following the Apostles, exalting them, praising them”. And therefore they gave the order to “throw them in prison”. But, Francis continued, “at night an angel of God freed them, and this was not the first time”.

That’s why, when “the priests met in the morning to judge them, the prison was closed, securely locked, and they weren’t there”. Then they learned that the Apostles had gone back again to Solomon’s Portico, to preach to the people. And so once again the priests had them brought in.

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles offered in the day’s liturgy, the Pontiff stated, recounts just what happened at that moment: the captain and the officers “brought the Apostles and presented them to the Sanhedrin”. And again, the Scripture reads that “the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us’”.

In response to these accusations, Peter replied: “We must obey God rather than men”. And thus “salvation history repeats up to Jesus”. But “in hearing Peter’s kerygma, Peter’s preaching on the people redemption which God performed through Jesus”, the members of the Sanhedrin “were enraged and wanted to kill them”. They were, in fact, “incapable of recognizing the salvation of God” despite being “doctors” who had “studied the history of the people, studied the prophecies, studied the law, thus they knew all the theology of the people of Israel, the revelation of God, they knew everything: they were doctors”.

The question is “why was there there this hardness of heart?”. Yes, the Pope said, it wasn’t a matter of “hardheadedness, it wasn’t simple stubbornness”. The hardness was in their hearts. And therefore “one could ask: what is the route to this total stubbornness of head and heart? How does one reach this closure, which even the Apostles had before the Holy Spirit came”. Indeed, Jesus said to the two disciples at Emmaus: “O foolish men, and slow to believe the things of God”.

At its root, Francis explained, “they story of this stubbornness, the route, is in closing oneself off, not engaging in dialogue, it is the lack of dialogue”. Those were people who “didn’t know how to dialogue, they didn’t know how to dialogue with God because they didn’t know how to pray and to

hear the Lord's voice; and they didn't know how to dialogue with others".

This closure to dialogue led them to interpret "the law in order to make it more precise, but they were closed to the signs of God in history, they were closed to the people: they were closed, closed". And "the lack of dialogue, this closure of heart, led them not to obey God".

After all, "this is the tragedy of these doctors of Israel, these theologians of the People of God: they didn't know how to listen, they didn't know how to dialogue". This is because, the Pope explained, "dialogue is done with God and with our brothers". And "this rage and desire to silence all those who preach, in this case the newness of God, that is, Jesus is Risen" is clearly "the sign that one doesn't know how to dialogue, that a person isn't open to the voice of the Lord, to the signs that the Lord makes among his people". Therefore, although they had no reason to, they became infuriated and wanted to put the disciples to death. "It is a painful route", Francis remarked, also because "these are the same men who paid the guards at the tomb to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body: they do everything possible not to open themselves to God's voice".

Before continuing with the celebration of the Eucharist — "which is the life of God, who speaks to us from on high, as Jesus says to Nicodemus" — Francis prayed "for the teachers, for the doctors, for those who teach the People of God, that they never be closed, that they dialogue, and thus save themselves from the wrath of God which, should they not change their attitude, will rest upon them".