



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Memory and service

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A Christian doesn't walk alone: he is part of a people and a secular history, and is called to place himself at the service of others. "Memory and service" were the key words of Pope Francis' reflection on Thursday morning, during Mass at Santa Marta. History, and thus the memory of it, along with service, the Pope said, are the "two features of Christian identity" contemplated in the day's Liturgy.

The Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (13:13-25) speaks of Paul, who arrived in Antioch and "went as usual into the synagogue on the Sabbath day". There, "he was invited to speak". This, in fact, was "a custom of the Jews of that time" when a guest arrived. Paul took the floor and "began preaching Jesus Christ". However, the Pope emphasized, "he didn't say: 'I preach Jesus Christ, the Saviour; He came from Heaven; God sent Him; He saved us all and gave us this revelation'. No, no, no". To explain who Jesus is, the Apostle "began reciting the entire history of the people". The Scripture reads: "So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said.... 'Listen. The God of this People Israel chose our fathers...". Thus, beginning with Abraham, Paul "recounts the entire history".

It wasn't a random choice, Francis pointed out. The same thing was done by "Peter in his sermons, after Pentecost" and also by "Stephen before the Sanhedrin". In other words, they "didn't proclaim Jesus without a history", but "Jesus within the history of the people, a people whom God made journey for centuries in order to mature, in the fullness of time, as Paul says". From this recitation it is also understood that "when this people reach the fullness of time, the Saviour comes, and the people continue to journey because this Saviour will return".

Here, then, the Pope highlighted, is one of the features of the Christian identity: "it is being men and women of history, by understanding that the story does not begin and end with me". Indeed, it all began when the Lord entered into history.

To support his statement, the Pontiff recalled the beautiful Psalm recited at the start of the Mass: "O God, when you went forth before your people, marching with them and living among them — remember that God walked with his people — the earth trembled, heavens poured down rain. Alleluia". Hence "Christians are men and women of history, because they do not belong to themselves", but are instead "included within a people, a people who journey". This is why there can be no thought of "Christian selfishness". There is no such thing as a perfect Christian, "a manufactured spiritual man or woman", but rather, a spiritual man or woman is always included "within a people, who have a long history and continue to journey until the Lord should return".

Looking precisely at these actual events which unravel throughout the centuries, a history which still continues today, the Pontiff added that if we assume "we are men and women of history", we also realize that this is the "history of God's grace, because God went forth with his people, paving the way, living among them". But it is also the "history of sin", the Pope recalled, of "how many sinners, how many criminals...". This can also be seen in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles, for example: "Paul mentions King David, a saint", but "before he became a saint he was a flagrant sinner". This, the Pope underscored, applies "even today" when "each one's personal history" must assume "her own sin and the grace of the Lord who is with us". God in fact accompanies us in sin "in order to forgive". He accompanies us "in grace".

Therefore, Francis' recollection in the homily is a very concrete reality throughout the centuries: "we are not without roots", he said. We have "deep roots" that we must never forget, which have come "from our father Abraham up to today".

To understand that we are not alone, that we are firmly linked to a people who have journeyed for centuries, means we must also understand a second Christian characteristic, which is "what Jesus teaches us in the Gospel: service". In the Reading from the Gospel according to John proposed for Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter, "Jesus washes the feet of the Apostles. After washing their feet He says to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Do unto others as I have done unto you. As I have come to you as a servant, you must be

servants of one another, serve”.

Clearly, the Pontiff said, “the Christian identity is that of service, not selfishness”. Although, he said, one might rebut: “Father, we are all selfish”, but this “is a sin, it’s an attitude we must break away from”. We must “ask for forgiveness, that the Lord convert us”. Being Christian “is not an appearance or a social practice, it isn’t a makeover for the soul, so that it might be a little prettier”. Being Christian, the Pope said decisively, “is doing what Jesus did: serving. He did not come to be served but to serve”.

After this, the Pontiff offered several suggestions for each of us to practice in everyday life. First of all, “think about these two things: do I have a sense of history? Do I feel I belong to a people who have journeyed from afar?”. It might be helpful to “take up the Bible, the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 26, and read it”. Here, he said, we meet with “the memory, the memory of the just” and “how the Lord wants us to be *memoriosi*”— in other words, that we remember “the road travelled by our people”. It will then be good to consider: “in my heart, what do I do more? Do I make others serve me, do I use others, the community, the parish, my family, my friends, or do I serve”, am I a servant?

Thus, “Memory and service” are two Christian attitudes, with which we also participate in the Eucharistic celebration, “which is really the memory of Jesus’ service; the actual memory, with Him, of the service that He rendered: giving his life for us”.