



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

How to safeguard the heart

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To understand God's time, the heart must be free of negative influences, in order to receive the gift of grace and not to be overwhelmed by worldly "noise". We must safeguard our heart in order to perceive when God passes through it. Pope Francis spoke of this in his homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday.

"Last week", he began, "we reflected on Paul's advice and on our Christian attitude. And also on what Jesus advises to his disciples: "give without pay what you received without pay". This refers, he explained, to the "gratuitousness of God's gift, the gratuitousness of salvation, the gratuitousness of the revelation of Jesus Christ as Saviour". And "this is a gift that God gave us and gives to us, every day".

Today, the Pope pointed out, "Paul returns to this topic and in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (6:1-10) he writes: "we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain". This is "the gratuitousness of God". Thus, Francis continued, we must not "accept it in vain" but "accept it well, with an open heart". Paul adds: "God says, in fact: 'At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.' Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation".

“The Lord has listened to us and has given us the gift, gratuitously”, the Pontiff affirmed, repeating the words of the Apostle: “Behold, now is the acceptable time”. Thus, he continued, “Paul advises us not to let pass the acceptable moment, namely the moment in which the Lord gives us this grace, gives us gratuitousness, not to forget this: that he has given it to us and gives it to us now”.

In fact, Francis explained, “in every age the Lord again gives us this grace, he again gives us this gesture, this gift: the gift that is gratuitous”. Therefore, Paul exhorts us “not to accept the grace of God in vain”. This is “because if we accept it in vain, we will put an obstacle in the way”. Indeed, the Apostle writes: “We put no obstacle in any one’s way”. This is precisely the obstacle “of the Christian who calls himself a Christian, even goes to Church, goes to Mass on Sundays, but does not live as a Christian: he lives as a socialite or a pagan”. And “when a person is like this, it causes scandal”.

After all, the Pope said, “how many times have we heard in our neighbourhoods, in the shops: ‘Look at him or her, at Mass every Sunday and then he or she does this, this, this, that...’”. This is how “people are scandalized”. This is what Paul is referring to when he says “not to accept the grace of God in vain”.

But then, “how should we accept” the grace? First of all, Francis explained, with the knowledge that it is “the acceptable time”, once again quoting Paul. Essentially, “we must be attentive to understand the time of God, when God passes through our heart”.

In this respect, “St Augustine said some beautiful words: ‘I am afraid when the Lord passes’ — ‘But why are you afraid if the Lord is good?’ — ‘No. I am afraid of not welcoming him, of not understanding that the Lord is passing, in this trial, in this word that I have heard, that moved my heart, in this example of holiness, so many things, in this tragedy’”. Thus, the Pope emphasized, “the Lord passes and gives us the gift”. But it is important “to safeguard the heart in order to be attentive to this gift of God”.

So, “how does one safeguard the heart?”, Francis asked. He then explained that we do so by “pushing away every noise that doesn’t come from the Lord, pushing away so many things that take peace away from us”. And “when these things — these passions of ours — are pushed away, the heart is prepared to understand that the Lord is passing” and therefore “to receive him and the grace”.

Thus it is important “to safeguard the heart, safeguard the heart from our passions”. And we have “so many passions”. But “even Jesus, in the Gospel, speaks to us about our passions”. In particular, Francis repeated the words of Matthew in the Gospel offered in the day’s liturgy (5:38-42): “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any

one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”.

This, the Pope said, is about “being free of passions and having a humble heart, a meek heart”. And “the heart is safeguarded by humility, meekness, never by fights, by wars”. Instead, he continued, “this is noise: worldly noise, pagan noise or the noise of the devil”. The heart should be “at peace”.

For this, Francis said, returning to Paul’s words to the Corinthians, it is important “to put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry”. He then added: “Paul speaks of ministry but also of the Christian witness, so that no fault may be found with it; and of peace and humility ‘in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger”.

These “are unpleasant things”, Francis remarked. From all of this “I must safeguard my heart in order to welcome the gratuitousness and the gift of God”. But “how do I do it?”, he asked. The answer is again found in the words of Paul: “by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit”. In short, with the space for “humility, benevolence, patience which looks only to God and with the heart open to the Lord who passes”.

Before continuing the Mass, the Pontiff asked the Lord that we “not accept the grace of God in vain, not accept the gratuitousness of God in vain, and for this”, that we may “learn how to safeguard our heart”. And he asked “Our Lady for the grace of meekness, humility and goodness, which really safeguard our heart, in order not to let the Lord pass, in order not to accept in vain the gift, the grace, that the Lord gives us”.