



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Never exclude

Thursday, 5 November 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 46, 13 November 2015)

It is by our deeds that Jesus asks us to include everyone, because as Christians “we do not have the right” to exclude others, nor to judge or close the doors on them. This “attitude of exclusion” is at the root of all wars, large and small, Pope Francis said. This message was part of his homily at Mass on Thursday morning in the Chapel of Santa Marta.

Referring to the day’s passage from the Letter to the Romans (14:7-12), Pope Francis noted that St Paul “does not tire of remembering the gift of God, the gift that God has given us in order to recreate and regenerate us”. And “he uses powerful words: ‘None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For this end Christ died and lived again: that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living’”. Therefore, the Pope re-emphasized, it is “Christ who unites, who makes unity; Christ who, by his sacrifice on Calvary, made it so that all people are included in salvation”.

“The attitude Paul wants to emphasize is precisely the attitude of inclusion”, the Pope explained. In fact, the Apostle “wants them to be inclusive, to include everyone, as the Lord did. He admonishes the Romans: ‘And you, with that which the Lord has made, why do you pass judgment on your

brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?”. Hence the Apostle “makes them feel that they have an attitude which is not the Lord’s”, because “the Lord includes. In another passage Paul also says: ‘From two peoples he has made one’”, while these people, instead, “exclude”.

“When we pass judgement on a person”, Pope Francis continued, “we create exclusion”, perhaps saying: “Not with this man, not with this woman, not with this one... no”. In doing so, “we remain in our little group and we are selective, and this is not Christian”. We say: “No, that person is a sinner, that person did this...”. The issue, the Pope continued, is that “we pass judgement on others”. The same thing “happened to Jesus”, as we read in the Gospel passage of Luke (15:1-10) in the Liturgy of the day: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus”, — that is, the excluded and those who were on the outside — “to hear him. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’”.

The Romans also had an attitude “of exclusion”, which is why Paul “warns them not to judge”. This is the same attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees, who say: “We are the perfect ones, we follow the law, while they are sinners and tax collectors”.

“Jesus’ attitude”, however, “is to include”. Here, the Pope explained, “there are two possible paths: the path of excluding people from our community and the path of including”. The first, “though to a limited degree, is at the root of all wars: all disasters, all conflicts begin with exclusion”. There is exclusion “from the international community, but also from families: among friends, how many fights!”. Instead, “the path that Jesus shows us, that he teaches us, is completely different, and it is opposed to the other: to include”.

In the Gospel we find “two parables”, the Pope explained, that “show us that it is not easy to include people because there is resistance, there is that selective attitude, and it is not easy”. The first parable speaks of “a shepherd who returns home with his sheep and realizes that out of 100, one is missing”. Surely he could have said: “Tomorrow I will find it...”. But instead, “he leaves everything”, despite being hungry and having worked all day, “and he goes, late in the evening, perhaps in the dark, to find it”. Jesus does the same “with these sinners, with the tax collectors: he goes to eat with them, to find them”.

The other parable to which the Pope referred is “the woman who loses a coin: the same thing happens, she lights a lamp, she sweeps her house and carefully searches until she finds it”. And “perhaps it takes all day, but she finds it”.

“What happens in both of these cases?” the Pope asked. The shepherd and the woman “are filled with joy, because they have found what was lost, and they go to their neighbours and friends, because they are so happy: ‘I have found it, I have taken it in!’”. This is precisely “the inclusion of God”, the Pope remarked, as opposed to “an exclusion of those who judge, who drive away people, persons”, who say “no, not this one, not this one, not this one...” and make “a small circle

of friends, which is the environment” of exclusion.

This, the Pope added, “is the dialectic between exclusion and inclusion: God has included everyone in salvation, everyone!”. And “this is the beginning: we, with our weaknesses and our sins, with our envy and jealousy, always have this attitude of excluding which, as I said before, can end in war”.

Jesus does the same as the Father did, “when he sent him to save us: he seeks us out to include us, to enter a community, to be a family”. And “Paul’s joy is the great salvation that he received from the Lord”. Thus, the Pope said, returning to the two Gospel parables, the joy of the shepherd and that of the woman lie precisely in “finding what they believed” had been “lost forever”.

Calling for reflection, Pope Francis suggested that we never judge, even “a little”, in “our little” way. Because “God knows: it is his life. But I do not exclude him from my heart, from my prayer, from my smile and, if the opportunity should arise, I will say something nice to him”. In short, “let us never exclude, we do not have the right” to do so. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “For we shall all present ourselves to God’s tribunal. So each of us shall give account of himself to God”. Therefore, “if I exclude, there will be a day of judgment before God’s tribunal, and I will have to give account of myself”.

The Pope concluded by asking for “the grace to be men and women who always include — always! — to the extent of sound reasoning, but always”. We must never “close the door on anyone”, but always have “an open heart”, and say “I like this one, or I do not like this one” but nevertheless “with an open heart”.