



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Under her mantle

Thursday, 15 September 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 38, 23 September 2016)

In a world of orphans, Mary is the mother who fully understands us and defends us, because she too has personally experienced the same humiliation suffered, for example, by the mothers of prisoners today. Celebrating Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Pope Francis recommended that in difficult moments we always seek refuge “under the mantle” of the Mother of God. Thus he repeated the “spiritual council of Russian mystics”, which in the West have been reprised in the antiphon *Sub tuum preasidium*.

Speaking about the “mystery of Mary’s motherhood”, the Pope drew inspiration from the scene of the Last Supper: “Jesus, at the table, bids farewell to his disciples: there is an air of sadness, everyone knew that there was something that would end badly and they asked questions, they were sad”. In Jesus’ farewell, however, “in order to give them a bit of courage and also to prepare them in hope, Jesus said to them: ‘Do not be sad, let not your hearts be sad, I will not leave you alone! I will ask the Father to send another Paraclete, who will accompany you. And he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said’”. The Lord, therefore, “promises to send the Holy Spirit in order to accompany the disciples, the Church, on the path of history”.

Jesus, however, “also speaks of the Father”. Indeed, Pope Francis recalled, “in that long, long

conversation with the disciples, he speaks of the Father”, assuring them “that the Father loves them and that anything that they ask of the Father, the Father will give to them”, that they “ought to trust in the Father”. In this way, the Pope explained, Jesus goes “a step further: not only does he say ‘I will not leave you alone’, but also ‘I will not leave you as orphans, I give you the Father, the Father is with you, my Father is your Father’”. Francis continued: “we know everything that happened after that dinner: the humiliation, the prison, the disciples’ betrayal; Peter denies Jesus, and the others flee”.

Referring to the passage in the liturgy of the day, taken from the Gospel of John (19:25-27), the Pope said that under the cross there was “only one disciple with Jesus’ mother, with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, a relative”. There, at the cross, “is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and everyone is looking at her”, perhaps whispering: “She is the mother of this criminal! She is the mother of this traitor”. And Mary, the Pope added, “heard these things, she suffered terrible humiliation and even heard some of the great priests, whom she respected because they were priests”, say to Jesus: “But you who are so great, come down, come down!”. Francis said that as Mary stood beside “her Son, naked there” on the cross. She experienced “such intense suffering, but did not leave, she did not deny her Son, He was her flesh”.

Sharing a personal anecdote, the Pope recalled: “When I was in the diocese of Buenos Aires, it would often happen that when I went to prisons to visit the inmates, I would see a queue, a line of women waiting to enter: they were the mothers, but they were not ashamed, their own flesh was there inside” the prison. Those “women suffered not only the shame of being there, hearing people say: ‘Look at her, what did her son do?’”. Those mothers “also suffered the worst humiliation of the inspections required before they could enter. But they were mothers, and they were going there to see their own flesh”. And so it was for Mary, who “was there, with her Son, with that great suffering”.

Precisely “at that time”, the Pope noted, “Jesus — who had said he would never leave us as orphans, who spoke of the Father — looked at his Mother and gave her to us as a Mother: ‘Behold, your Mother!’”. The Lord “does not leave us as orphans: we Christians have a Mother”, the same Mother that Jesus had; “we have a Father, the same as Jesus. We are not orphans”. And Mary “gives birth in that moment, with so much pain. It is truly a martyrdom: with her pierced heart, she agrees in that painful moment to give birth to all of us. And from that moment on she became our Mother, since that moment she is our Mother, the one who takes care of us and is not ashamed of us: she defends us”.

“The Russian mystics of the early centuries of the Church”, Pope Francis noted, in this regard, “counseled their disciples, the young monks to take refuge under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God during times of spiritual turmoil. The devil cannot enter there because she is Mother, and as a Mother she defends”. Thus “the West took this counsel and created the first Marian antiphon, *Sub tuum praesidium*: under your mantle, placed under your care, O Mother, we are safe there”.

“Today is the Feast of the moment that Mary gave birth to us”, the Pope continued, “and she has been faithful to this offspring to this very day, and will continue to be faithful”. In a world “which we might call an ‘orphan’, this world that suffers the crisis of a great orphanhood, perhaps we can offer our help by saying: ‘Look to your mother!’”. Because we have a mother “who defends us, teaches us, accompanies us, and is not ashamed of our sins”. Indeed, “she is not ashamed, because she is Mother”.

In conclusion, the Holy Father prayed that “the Holy Spirit — this friend, this companion on the journey, this Paraclete and advocate that the Lord sent to us — will help us to understand this truly great mystery of Mary’s motherhood”.