



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Mediators or intermediaries

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(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

Pope Francis offered the icons of Saint Polycarp, Saint Francis Saverio and Saint Paul to seminarians of Rome as he was about to be beheaded. As he did so, the Pope advised his audience to live the priesthood as authentic mediators between God and the people, joyful even on the cross, and not as intermediary functionaries, rigid and worldly, attentive only to their particular interests and consequently are dissatisfied. The Pontiff outlined this authentic profile of priesthood, during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, 9 December.

“The Lord suffered a great deal because of the attitude of the people” — Francis said in his homily — “and several times he said: ‘How long must I put up with you?’”. Noting immediately that in the day’s passage of the Gospel of Matthew (11:16-19), Jesus remarked: “they are like children whom you offer something and they don’t like it; you offer them the opposite” but they don’t like that either. They are dissatisfied people, in short “incapable of being satisfied in their attitude with Lord”. Indeed, “there are many dissatisfied Christians”, the Pope warned, “who are unable to understand what the Lord has taught us, unable to understand the very crux of the revelation of the Gospel”.

Francis then directly addressed the community of the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary, “posing the query, seminarians and formators”, asking them whether “there are also dissatisfied priests”. Because, he recognized, they do exist, “and they do much harm when they live a life that isn’t full;

they do not find peace from one part to another, always thinking about projects and then, when they have them in hand”, they say: “No, I don’t like them!”. All this, the Pope added, is “because their hearts are far from the logic of Jesus and for this reason there are some dissatisfied priests, they are not happy, they complain and live sadly”.

But “what is the logic of Jesus that gives full satisfaction to a priest?”, asked the Pontiff. Offering the response immediately: it is “the logic of the mediator”. Jesus “is the mediator between God and us; and we must take the path of the mediator and not the other figure who really resembles it, but is not the same: the intermediary”. Because, the Pope affirmed, there is a “difference between a mediator and an intermediary”. Indeed, “an intermediary does his work and takes his pay: you want to sell this house, you want to buy a house, I will be the intermediary and take a percentage; it is fair, it was my job”. Thus, “the intermediary takes this path: he will never be lost”.

“The mediator, on the other hand” — Francis explained — “forfeits himself in order to unite the parties, giving his life, himself, that is the price: his actual life, he pays with his life, his weariness, his work, many things”. And, the Pope added, “the parish priest” gives his life “to unite the flock, to unite the people, to lead them to Jesus”. Because “the logic of Jesus as mediator is the logic of humbling oneself”. In fact, Saint Paul, “in the Letter to the Philippians, is clear about this: ‘he humbled himself, emptied himself’ in order to make this union, unto death”, and to “death on the cross”.

Therefore, this “is the logic: empty yourself, humble yourself”. And this is “not because you seek this, but the attitude of the mediator leads you to this”. It is the style of “closeness: God who became close to his people, in the Old Testament, and then sending his Son: that *synkatabasis* of God who has come close to us”. This is why “the priest is a mediator very close to his people, very close”.

Instead, the intermediary, the Pope mentioned “is this functionary: he does his job, he does things more or less well, and then finishes that job and takes another, another, and another, but always as a functionary”. The intermediary “does not know what it means to get his hands dirty; the mediator lives by getting dirty because he is in the middle, there, in reality, like Jesus: tarnished by our sins”. This is why, Francis shared, “I do not know any man or any woman who works as an intermediary and is happy with only that. No, that does not make you happy”. For this reason, “when the priest changes from mediator to intermediary he is not happy, he is sad”. He ends up this way by seeking “happiness in making himself seen, in making his authority felt”.

The day’s Gospel passage, the Pontiff pointed out, reveals that “Jesus said to the intermediaries of his time that they liked walking through the town squares so the people would see them and praise them: it is so”. But “to make themselves important, the intermediary priests take the path of rigidity: often, separated from the people, they do not know what human pain is; they forget what they learned at home, through the efforts of their father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and

siblings". Losing "these things, they become rigid, those rigid men who burden the faithful with many things that they do not bear, as Jesus said to the intermediaries of his time".

"Rigidity" basically means taking a "whip in hand with the People of God: you cannot do this, you cannot do that". And thus, "many people approach, seeking a bit of consolation, a little understanding", but instead they are "distanced by this rigidity". However, "rigidity cannot be maintained for very long", not "completely". Moreover, rigidity means being "fundamentally schizoid: you end up appearing rigid, but inside you are a disaster".

Moreover, along with rigidity comes worldliness. In this way "a worldly, rigid priest is dissatisfied because he has taken the wrong path". Actually, "on the subject of rigidity and worldliness", Pope Francis shared an anecdote, something that "happened some time ago: an elderly monsignor came to me", a member "of the curia, who worked, a normal man, a good man, in love with Jesus; and he told me that he had gone to Euroclero to buy a couple of shirts and saw a young man in front of the mirror – he couldn't have been more than 25; he was either a young priest or was about to become a priest – in front of the mirror, with a large, ample, velvet cloak with a silver chain, and he was looking at himself. Then he picked up a "saturno" hat, put it on and looked at himself: a worldly, rigid man". And the "very wise monsignor", Pope Francis continued, "managed to overcome his pain" with a dose of "healthy humour and added: 'and they say the Church doesn't allow women in the priesthood!'"'. Thus, "when a priest becomes a functionary", in the end things become "ridiculous, always".

"In the examination of conscience", said Pope Francis directly to the seminary community, 'consider this: Was I a functionary or a mediator today? Did I safeguard myself, did I seek for myself, my comfort, my order, or did I let the day go to the service of others?'".

The right attitude, the Pope suggested, is that of always keeping "the door open" and smiling: "even with many difficulties, the mediator smiles, he is tender, the mediator has tenderness, he knows how to caress a child". Indeed, the Pope added, "someone once told me that he recognized priests by their manner with children: if they know how to caress a child, smile at a child, play with a child". This is "interesting, because it means they know how to humble themselves, to approach the little things", which is precisely what children are.

However, the Pontiff advised, "the intermediary is sad". His face is always "sad, too serious, dark; the intermediary has a dark gaze, very dark". On the contrary, "the mediator is open: a smile, acceptance, understanding, a caress, and among difficulties he has joy". Because "a mediator is joyful even on the cross". In this regard Francis indicated the testimony of Saint Alberto Hurtado who, in the face of "many difficulties and persecution, prayed only in this way, content: 'Lord!'". He was "content, happy being a mediator, in that situation".

The Pope then shared with the seminarians his wish to convey to them, "looking at these

dissatisfied men” described in the Gospel of Matthew, “this reflection on dissatisfied priests”, advising the young men to “think about it”.

In this perspective the Pontiff took “from the history of the Church, three icons which will help us: three icons of priests” who were “mediators and not intermediaries”. The first icon is that of the “great Polycarp, Eleazaro the New Testament version: a man of himself who did not negotiate his vocation and went bravely to the pyre, and when the fire enveloped him, the faithful who were there smelled the odour of bread”. Indeed, truly, “he was like a loaf of bread; he gave himself to the very end”, which is how “a mediator ends up: as a piece of bread for his faithful”.

While the first icon portrays “an elderly man”, the second is “a young man: Saint Francis Saverio”, who “died on the shore of San-cian, looking at China, at the age of 46”. So young, in fact, that we could call it “a waste”, and ask ourselves why “the Lord did not allow him to still be there”. But Saint Francis Saverio’s attitude was that of saying: “Thy will be done, Lord”. He was able to simply say to the Lord: “I confessed your name until the very end; never, Lord, did I hide the lamp under the bed; you gave me five talents, I give five back to you”. And in this way, “in peace, in joy, he went”. This is how “a young mediator, too, who never knew this dissatisfaction”, met his end.

Likewise, as the third beautiful icon, who also brings us to tears, the Pope indicated that of the “elderly Paul of the Three Fountains: early that morning the soldiers went to him, took him, and he walked hunched over, as if with a weight on his shoulders”. Paul, Francis explained, completely “understood very well that this was happening due to the betrayal of other people within the Christian community: but he struggled a lot in his life, which he offered to the Lord as a sacrifice”. And thus, he met his end. The Pope confided that he felt “such tenderness” in “watching Paul as he walked to moment of his beheading”.

These are “three icons who can help us”, the Pontiff concluded, asking that we look to them and think about “how I want my priestly life to end: as a functionary, as an intermediary or as a mediator, that is, on the cross”.