



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ**

Worldly temptations

Tuesday, 21 February 2017

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 9, 3 March 2017)

The focus of Pope Francis' homily on Tuesday, was the daily struggle of all Christians as they try to overcome "worldly temptations", such as thinking they are "better than others".

The temptation is inevitable, the Pontiff explained, inspired by the day's liturgy of the Word, taken from the Book of Sirach (2:1-13), which reads: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation, set your heart right and be steadfast" (cf. vv. 1-2). The Pope explained that "Christian life is a life with temptation" and, therefore, "we must be prepared for temptation", because "we will all be tempted".

This is confirmed in the Gospel of Mark (9:30-37), which, the Pope said, indicates that Jesus "went with his disciples decisively, resolutely, toward Jerusalem, in order to fulfil his mission", that of "doing the Father's will". Jesus informed the disciples in advance what would happen in Jerusalem: "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise". Not even the disciples understood "these words, and they were afraid to ask him to delve into the explanation". Thus, they said: "Let's stop here. It's better". In other words, they gave in to "the temptation not to fulfil the mission", a temptation, the Pontiff emphasized, to which Jesus was also subjected "at least twice". The first time was in the

desert, with the devil's three propositions "do redemption but for another, easier life", a life "more down-to-earth". Another time, "it was Peter who tempted him", when, as Jesus spoke of His fate, Peter said: "No, this will never happen, Lord!". To him too, Jesus replied, "begone Satan!". Indeed, "Peter was doing the same thing that the devil, Satan, had done in the desert".

Something "interesting" in the Gospel narrative, Francis pointed out, is that the disciples "did not want to hear these words of Jesus". Rather, "they did not understand these words and were afraid to ask him". The disciples' difficulty is further clarified later in the reading. "When they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus asked them: 'What were you discussing on the way?'". Here too, the Pope underscored, they "were silent". But this time they were silent "out of shame". Indeed, whereas the first time they were "afraid" and repeated, "no, let's not ask anything more: it's better to keep quiet", this time they felt ashamed because along the way "they had discussed with one another who was the greatest". They were ashamed of this discussion. It was a two-fold attitude: that of fear and that of shame, the Pope explained. "They were good people who wanted to follow the Lord, to serve the Lord. But they did not know that the way of serving the Lord was not very easy; it was not like enlisting in an entity, a charitable association". Thus, he said, "they were afraid of this". On the other hand, they had "the temptation of worldliness".

But, Francis advised, the temptation was not theirs alone: "From the moment that the Church became Church up until today, this has happened, it happens and will happen". For example, it happens "in parishes" where there are always "struggles", and one might hear someone say: "I want to be president of this association, I will try to climb a little"; or "who is the greatest one here? Who is the greatest one in this parish? No, I am more important than he is, and that man there is not because he did something...". The temptation of worldliness is where "the chain of sins" begins, sins such as "speaking ill of others" and gossiping, which are all things that serve one who seeks to "climb".

It is a temptation, the Pope cautioned, from which the clergy are not exempt: "At times we priests say, shamefully, in the presbyterate: 'I would like that parish...' — 'But the Lord is here...' — 'But I would like that one...'". In other words, we follow "not the path of the Lord", but that "of vanity, of worldliness". And, he continued, "even among us bishops, the same happens: worldliness comes as a temptation". And so it happens that a bishop says: "I am in this diocese but I would like that one which is more important", and he tries to make an impression, to influence, to push "in order to get there". In short, the Pontiff clarified, "the mission is to serve the Lord, but, often, our real desire pushes us toward the path of worldliness in order to be more important". Then there may be disappointment, as it was for Jesus' disciples, who "first kept quiet out of fear, then remained silent out of shame".

The Pope called this "holy shame!", and suggested we always ask the Lord for "the grace to be ashamed, when we find ourselves in these situations".

The criterion for choosing our actions, in the face of certain temptations, is explained by Jesus in the same Gospel passage: “he sat down and said to them, ‘If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all’” and, taking a child in his arms, he said: “Become as this child”. Christ, explained the Pope, “overturned everything. Glory and the Cross, greatness and the child”.

This, the Pontiff concluded, is a Gospel passage that “leads us to pray for the Church, to pray for all of us that the Lord may protect us from ambition, from the worldliness of feeling that we are greater than others”. May the Lord “grant us the grace of shame, that holy shame, when we find ourselves in that situation”. May he grant us the grace to say: “Am I capable of thinking this way? When I see my Lord on the cross, do I want to use the Lord in order to climb?”. But also, he added, may the Lord “give us the grace of childlike simplicity”, of understanding the importance of the “path of service” and, at the end of a life of service, to be able to say: “I am an unworthy servant”.