



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The Church is not for the lukewarm

Tuesday, 23 May

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 24, 16 June 2017)

The Church ought not ever to be “lukewarm” and is called, as is every single Christian, to a journey of “daily conversion”. It is important to be attentive and not to become comfortable within a “tranquil” or “worldly” state, but rather to be always open to “the joyful proclamation that Jesus is Lord”. As an example, the Pope recalled Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero during Mass on Tuesday, 23 May, the second anniversary of the latter’s beatification.

The Holy Father began his homily by returning to the day’s first reading (Acts 16:22-34) and, while explaining that this was the final part of a broader discourse, he summarized the entire passage. It is a crucial moment in the preaching of Paul and Silas who, having arrived at the city of Philippi, found “a slave who was a soothsayer” and who, as a result, earned a lot of money for her masters. This woman, seeing that the two were “going to pray”, began to cry out: “These are the servants of God!”. Apparently, the Pope noted, this was a type of “praise”. But her words, repeated “for many days”, brought about a certain consequence. We read in the Acts, in fact, that “Paul was annoyed”. The Apostle, the Holy Father explained, “had the spirit of discernment and knew that this woman was possessed by an evil spirit”, so “he turned to her” and “cast out the evil spirit”. The immediate consequence was that “this woman, this slave, could no longer practice magic and her masters saw that their earnings had disappeared — they had been earning a lot — and so they

seized Paul and Silas and took them to the rulers". A series of accusations began. And here, the day's passage indicates that "the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks".

At this point, however, the Pope said that "God intervened" and thus, at "about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them"; there was "a great earthquake ... and all the doors were opened". With this exceptional occurrence, the jailer, fearing that the prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself because, according to "the law of the time", when prisoners escaped, the jailer was held responsible.

But "Paul cried with a loud voice: 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here'. And that man did not understand: 'How can this have happened? That these delinquents, instead of taking the opportunity to escape, are still here?'". The jailer recognized that "something very strange" had occurred, "and that this was some sign from God; including the earthquake, the opened doors and also that not one of them had escaped". He rushed in "and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them outside and said: 'Men, what must I do to be saved?'". Evidently, Pope Francis noted, this was "a man whose heart was touched by the Spirit". The two men responded: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household"; they celebrated this grace". This, the Pope said, concluding the narrative, is "a beautiful story that makes us think".

From here he pointed out how, above all in the present incident, we meet with a type of "transition". It starts, in fact, from "a situation of calm preaching where Paul and Silas should have been pleased with the fact that this slave who had quite a lot of authority, this sorceress, this soothsayer, said that they were men of God". The fact is that that "was not in truth". And "Why?", the Holy Father asked. "Because Paul", the Pope responded, "moved by the Spirit, understood that that was not the Church of Christ, that that was not the way of conversion for that city, that everyone would remain calm, that there were no conversions. Yes, all accepted the doctrine: 'How lovely, how beautiful, we are all fine'".

This situation, the Pope emphasized, "repeats" many times "in the history of salvation": in fact, "when the People of God were calm, or at the service of worldliness"; but when they served "worldliness and they were lukewarm", the Lord "sent prophets". Furthermore: "the same thing happened to the prophets as happened to Paul: they were persecuted, beaten. Why? Because they were causing trouble". This is exactly what Paul did, "the man of discernment", understood that the spirit possessed the sorceress, that "it was a spirit of tepidness, that it was making the

Church lukewarm". And "thus, he understood the deceit and he cast out the evil spirit. And the truth came out".

This dynamic, the Holy Father said, occurs even today in the Church: "when someone denounces various mundane ways, he is regarded with a strange look; this man is strange, better to keep clear of him". And the Pope added: "I recall in my own country many, many men and women, fine consecrated people, not ideologues, but who would say: 'No, the Church of Jesus is like this...', and some people said of them: 'he's a communist, throw him out!'. And they would cast them out; they would persecute them. Just think of Blessed Romero". And this happened to "many, many people in the history of the Church, even here in Europe".

This is explained by the fact that "the evil spirit prefers a calm Church without risks, a Church of business, a comfortable Church, comfortably tepid, lukewarm".

To better understand this reasoning, the Pope recalled two words found in the day's Scripture passage, one "at the beginning of the story" and one "at the end". If one reads carefully, in fact, one can see that "the masters of this woman, this slave, this sorceress, were angry because they had lost their ability to earn money". And so the first word: "money". In fact "the evil spirit always enters through the pocket" and, the Holy Father suggested, "when the Church is lukewarm, calm, all organized, when there are no problems, look immediately to where there is business".

There is then a second word that emerges towards the end of the passage: "joy". In fact we read that the jailer, after being baptized, "set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God". Thus, "the way of our daily conversion", Pope Francis said, is "to pass from a worldly way of life, calm, without risks, Catholic, yes, yes, but so lukewarm, to a state of life in the true proclamation of Jesus, to the joy of proclaiming Christ; to pass from a religiosity which looks too much at earnings, to [the way of] faith and to proclaiming: 'Jesus is Lord'". And this, Francis added, "is the miracle which the Holy Spirit works".

Therefore, the Pope suggested a re-reading of chapter 16 of the Acts of the Apostles so as to better understand "this journey" and also how "the Lord with his witnesses, with his martyrs, moved the Church forward". We must recognize that "a Church without martyrs creates doubt; a Church which does not risk creates doubt; a Church which is afraid to proclaim Jesus Christ and to cast out demons, idols, the other lord, which is money, is not the Church of Jesus".

Concluding his meditation, Francis recalled that, in the liturgy of the day, there was a prayer in which we thank "the Lord for the renewed youthfulness which Jesus gives us". Even the Church of Philippi, he said, "was renewed and became a young Church". We ought then to pray until "we all have this: a renewed youthfulness, a conversion from a lukewarm way of living to the joyful proclamation that Jesus is Lord".

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana