



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

A daily struggle

Friday, 20 November 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 48, 27 November 2015)

Based on the day's Liturgy, Francis spoke again of the Church and the risks you take when you allow the temptation of worldliness to overcome you: when, instead of being faithful to the Lord, you let yourself be seduced by money and power.

In the homily of the Mass at Santa Marta on Friday, the Pope emphasized that "in recent days" the Church has called us to ponder "the process of worldliness, of apostasy that ends in persecution". The Scripture passages of the day proposed a reflection on "that worldliness of the People of God who wanted to replace their covenant with the customs of all the pagan people". A drift, the Pontiff explained, that leads to "single-mindedness"; and those who did not adhere were "persecuted", after "many martyrs" and "so much suffering". An example can be found in the Readings over the previous few days, in the story of the elderly scribe Eleazar, "who gave an example, to the very end, of his fidelity to the law".

In the excerpt from the first Book of the Maccabees (4:36-37, 52-59) we read how "these pagans, this spirit of worldliness" were defeated. Judas and his brothers immediately said: "Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it". In this way, the Pope explained, the whole People of God felt happy, because they found that they had rediscovered

“their true identity, that of their covenant with the living God; not that of worldliness, which was proposed to them”. The Pope noted that the temple was re-consecrated “with songs and harps and lutes and symbols. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, that had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar with burnt offerings, with gladness and praise”.

An “attitude of celebration” is seen in these lines. And, Pope Francis said, “celebrating is something that worldliness does not know how to do, cannot do”, because “the worldly spirit leads us at most to have a little fun”, and to make “a little noise”; but “joy comes only from fidelity to the covenant and not from these mundane proposals”.

“The same” happened to Jesus, the Pontiff explained, when he went to the temple and “began to drive out those who sold, chasing them all away, saying to them: ‘It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer; but you, however, have made it a den of robbers’”. It is a similar situation: at the “time of the Maccabees it was precisely the worldly spirit that had taken the place of worshiping the living God”. Here too we encounter “the worldly spirit”, although “in a different way”. At that time, the Pope explained, recalling the Gospel of Luke (19:45-48) which had been read shortly before, “the leaders of the temple, the chief priests and scribes, had changed things a bit. They had entered into a process of decay and had rendered the temple impure, they had blemished the temple”.

But this message is also relevant for Christians today, because “the temple is a symbol of the Church”. And, the Pope said, “the Church will always — always! — suffer the temptation of worldliness and the temptation of power that is not the power Jesus Christ wills for her”. Jesus does not say: “No, do not do this, do it outside”, but instead: “You have made a den of robbers here!”. The Pope commented that “when the Church enters into this process of degradation the end is awful. Very bad!”.

Francis focused on this fundamental concept, recalling again the images of the Old Testament where we see “that poor elderly priest” who was “there, weak” and “allowed his priest sons to become corrupted”. It is a current danger. In fact, the Pope said, “there is always the temptation of corruption within the Church”. One falls into it when, “instead of being attached to fidelity to the Lord Jesus, the Lord of peace, joy and salvation”, one is “seduced by money and power”. We read the same in the Gospel today, where the “chief priests, the scribes, were attached to money, power, and had forgotten the spirit”. What’s more, “to justify themselves and say that they were right, that they were good, they replaced the Lord’s spirit of freedom with rigidity”.

In this regard, the Pope recalled that Jesus, in Chapter 23 of the Gospel of Matthew, speaks precisely “of their rigidity”. We see that people, just as we read in the passage from the Old Testament, “had lost their sense of God, even the capacity for joy and the ability to praise: they did not know how to praise God, because they were attached to money and power, to forms of

worldliness”.

At this point the Pope continued to analyze the Gospel scene, noting that the chief priests and scribes “were angry”. Jesus did not chase them from the temple, but those “who were doing business, the businessmen of the temple”; however, “the chief priests and the scribes were connected with them”, because they evidently received money from them. This was, Pope Francis said, the “holy bribe”. They “were attached to money and worshiped it as ‘holy’”.

The words in the Gospel passage are very strong, and say that the chief priests, the scribes and the leaders of the people “sought to destroy him”. The same had happened in the time of Judah Maccabee. “Why?” the Pope asked. He explained the difficulties faced by those who opposed Jesus: “They did not know what to do because all the people hung on his every word, listening”. Jesus’ strength, therefore, “was his word, his testimony and his love. And where there is Jesus, there is no place for worldliness, no place for corruption”.

All this is clear even today: “This is the struggle each one of us faces, this is the daily struggle of the Church”, which is called to be “always with Jesus”. And Christians must “always hang on his every word, to hear his word; and never seek security where there are things of another master”. After all, “you cannot serve two masters: either God or riches; God or power”.

That’s why, Pope Francis concluded, “it is good for us to pray for the Church, to think of the many martyrs today who suffer and die in order to avoid entering into this spirit of worldliness, single-mindedness and apostasy. Today!”. Recalling that “today the Church has more martyrs than in the early days”, the Pope urged that “it is good for us to think about them, and also to ask for the grace” to never enter “into this process of degrading into the worldliness that leads us to become attached to money and power”.