



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The Jonah Syndrome

Monday, 14 October 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 42, 18 October 2013)

On Monday, 14 October, Pope Francis commented on the liturgical readings of the day taken from St Paul's Letter to the Romans (1:1-7) and the Gospel of St Luke, in which the Lord says: "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (11:29-32).

Pope Francis first noted the forcefulness of the Lord's words. He explained, however, that Jesus was speaking principally to the doctors of the law and to those who were seeking to put him to the test and demanding proofs.

Before commenting on the sign of Jonah, Pope Francis described what he termed "the Jonah syndrome". He explained: "Johan did not want to travel to Nineveh, and so he fled to Spain. In his mind: the teaching is this, you have to believe this. If they are sinners, they can sort it out for themselves; I have nothing to do with it!".

"This is the Jonah syndrome," he said, "and Jesus condemns it. For example, in chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel those who have this syndrome are called hypocrites. They do not want the poor to be saved". He continued: "The Jonah syndrome afflicts those without zeal for the conversion of

others; what they are looking for is a holiness, if I may say, a holiness they can pick up at the dry-cleaners. It is clean and pressed but wholly lacking in the zeal that leads us to preach and proclaim the Lord”.

Pope Francis then contrasted this with the sign of Jonah: “In St Matthew's version, we read that Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights. This refers to Jesus in the tomb, to his death and resurrection. This is the sign that Jesus promises: against hypocrisy, against the attitude of perfect religiosity, against the attitude of the Pharisees”.

“The sign which Jesus promises,” the Pope said, “is his forgiveness, through his death and resurrection”. Therefore, “the true sign of Jonah is the one that gives us confidence in being saved by the blood of Christ”. He continued: “There are many Christians who think they are saved on the basis of what they do, on the basis of their works. Works are necessary, but they are a consequence, a response to the merciful love that saves us”.

“The Jonah syndrome afflicts those who trust only in their personal righteousness, in their works,” the Pope explained. It is a grave illness, while the sign of Jonah is the mercy of God in Jesus Crucified and Risen for us, for our salvation”.

Today's liturgy, the Pope concluded, puts the decision before us: “Do we want to follow the syndrome or the sign of Jonah?”.