



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Without fear of freedom

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Pope Francis commented on the Gospel of St Matthew (11:16-19), in which Jesus compares the generation of his contemporaries to “children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates: ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn’”.

The Pope recalled that in the Gospels Jesus “always speaks fondly of children”, he offers them as “models of Christian life” and he invites us “to be like them in order to enter into the Kingdom of God”. Today’s Gospel passage “is the only instance in which he does not speak well of them”. The Pope called the image “a bit particular”; the children are “ill-mannered, malcontent, even coarse, ever refusing the invitations of the others: nothing suits them”. Jesus uses this image to describe “the leaders of the people,” whom the Holy Father called “people who were not open to the God’s word”.

A point of interest for the Holy Father: they did not refuse “the message, but the messenger”. As we read further on in the same passage: “John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”. In practice, men have always found reason to delegitimize the preacher. Just think of the people of that time, Pope Francis said, who preferred “to escape into a more elaborate religion: in moral precepts like the

Pharisees, in political compromise like the Sadducees, in social revolution like the zealots, in gnostic spirituality like the Essenes". "All of them," he added, "had their well cleaned, well ordered system," but they did not accept "the preacher". That is why Jesus refreshes their memory by recalling the prophets who were persecuted and killed.

To accept "the truth of Revelation" and not "the preacher" reveals a mentality that comes from "a life caged in precepts, compromises, revolutionary plans, in a disincarnate spirituality". Pope Francis referred particularly to those Christians "who do not allow themselves to dance when the preacher gives them good news of joy, who do not allow themselves to cry when the preacher gives them sad news"; i.e., to those Christians "who are closed, caged, who are not free for fear of the freedom of the Holy Spirit that comes through preaching".

The Pope continued: "This is the scandal of preaching of which St Paul spoke; the scandal of preaching that ends in the scandal of the Cross". In fact, he added, "it is scandalous that God should speak to us through limited, sinful men; and it is even more scandalous that God should speak to us and save us through a man who says he is the Son of God, but ends like a criminal". "These sad Christians do not believe in the Holy Spirit; they do not believe in that freedom that comes through preaching, that admonishes you, that teaches you, that even smacks you around a bit, but it is freedom which makes the Church grow".

Therefore, the Gospel image of the "children who are afraid to dance and cry" and who "are afraid of everything, who ask to be assured about everything" reminds us of "those sad Christians, who are always criticizing preachers of truth because they are afraid to open the door to the Holy Spirit". Pope Francis concluded his homily by exhorting all those present to pray for them and everyone, so that "we do not become sad Christians", who rob "the Holy Spirit of the freedom of coming among us through the scandal of preaching".