



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The Christian community in three brushstrokes

Tuesday, 29 April 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 19, 9 May 2014)

Pope Francis reflected on the day's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (4:32). He emphasized how the Church, after having reflected over the course of last week on the meaning of "being born from above", today sets before our eyes the icon of "the community of new Christians": a "newborn people" made up of people who "as yet were not called Christians".

The Pope considered the "three brushstrokes" in which the liturgy places this icon before us. "The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul: this is the first trait" he said. The second is constituted by the fact that they were a company that with great power bore testimony to the Lord Jesus. The third characteristic was that "none among them was needy".

These, the Holy Father explained, were the three "traits of this people reborn: harmony among themselves, peace; powerful testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the poor". Yet "it wasn't always like this," he added. In fact, with the passing of time "infighting, doctrinal battles, and power struggles arose among them. Problems arose even in their relationship with the poor; widows complained that they were not well looked after". In short, there was no shortage of difficulties.

And yet this icon also reveals how "a Christian community's way of life" ought to be. First, it is necessary to create a climate in which "peace and harmony" reign: "They were of one heart and

soul'. Peace, a community in peace. This means that there is no room in the community for gossip, envy, calumny, defamation"; there is only room for peace. For "forgiveness and love cover everything".

To be able to describe a Christian community in this way, the Pope said, we must consider their attitudes: "Are they meek and humble? In the community, is there quarreling among them over power, are there battles due to envy? Is there gossiping? If so, then they are not on the path of Jesus Christ". Indeed, the Bishop of Rome said, peace in a community is "such an important feature". "It is so important because the devil seeks to divide us, always. He is the father of division; through envy he divides. Jesus enables us to see this path, that of peace among us, of love among us".

Passing on to the second feature of this icon, the Pope invited those present to ask themselves if the Christian community "bears testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: does this parish, this community, this diocese truly believe that Jesus Christ is Risen?". In cases when the response is not explicit and decisive, "hearts perhaps are far away" from this certainty. Yet we need "to give witness that Jesus Christ is alive among us": only thus can we verify what a community is like.

Lastly, the Pontiff spoke about the poor and their place among us. On this point we must examine our conscience, he said. This examination can be separated into two parts: "what is your attitude, or the attitude of this community, to the poor?"; and "is this community poor? Poor in heart or poor in spirit? Or does it place its trust in riches, in power?".

The Pope concluded by repeating the three key characteristics of a Christian community: "Harmony, testimony, poverty and care for the poor". This is what Jesus emphasized with Nicodemus, the Pope said. For everything is the work of the Holy Spirit, "the only One who can accomplish this". For "it is the Holy Spirit who creates the Church. The Spirit creates unity; the Spirit spurs you on to bear witness; the Spirit makes you poor, for He is the true wealth; and he does this so that you may take care of the poor. That is why Jesus tells us: 'The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit'. We don't know how: the Spirit comes and goes, but he does all these things".

In closing, the Pope issued this invitation: "Let us think about our communities, about our parishes, about our movements, about our seminaries, about our dioceses. It will be good for us to be confronted a little with this [icon]: is my community in peace and harmony or is it divided? Does my community bear witness to Jesus Christ or know that Christ is Risen, does it know it intellectually while it does nothing, does not proclaim it? Does my community care for the poor? It is a poor community?". May the Holy Spirit, he said, "help us to take this path, the path of all those who are reborn in Baptism".

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