The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The God of surprises

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“A heart that loves the law, for the law is God’s”, but “which also loves God’s surprises”, for his “holy law is not an end in itself”: it is a journey, “a teaching which leads us to Jesus Christ”. Pope Francis called us to ask the Lord for this in prayer, during Mass at the Chapel of Santa Marta.

The Pontiff rested mainly on the passage of the Gospel according to Luke (11:29-32), in which Jesus harshly criticizes the crowd gathered to hear him, as “an evil generation” because “it seeks a sign”. According to the Bishop of Rome “it is evident that Jesus is speaking to the doctors of the law”, who, “many times in the Gospel”, ask him for “a sign”. Indeed, they “do not see many of Jesus’ signs”. But this is precisely why “Jesus scolds them” on various occasions: “You are incapable of seeing the signs of the times”, he tells them in the Gospel of Matthew, drawing upon the image of the fig tree: “as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; and you do not understand the signs of the times”.

Pope Francis thus exhorted that we ask ourselves the reason that the doctors of the law did not understand the signs of the times and invoked an extraordinary sign. And he proposed several answers: the first was “because they were closed. They were closed within their system, they had organized the law very well”. It was “a masterpiece. All of the Jews knew what one could and

could not do, where one could go. It was all organized". But Jesus caught them unprepared, by doing "curious things", such as "going with the sinners", and "eating with the publicans". And the doctors of the law did not like this, they found it "dangerous", putting at risk "the doctrine which they, the theologians, had been making for centuries".

In this regard the Bishop of Rome acknowledged that it was a law "made for love, in order to be faithful to God", but it had become a closed regulatory system. They "had simply forgotten history. They had forgotten that God is the God of the law", but He is also "the God of surprises. And God, many times, also had surprises in store for his people": suffice it to think of the Red Sea and of "how he saved them" from slavery in Egypt, the Pope recalled.

Despite that, however, they "did not understand that God is always new; He never denies himself, He never says that something He had said was a mistake, never; but He always surprises. And they did not understand and they closed themselves within that system created with much good will; and they asked" that Jesus give them "a sign", failing to understand, however, "the many signs that Jesus made" and maintaining a completely "closed" attitude.

The second response to his initial question, the Pontiff pointed out, is attributable to the fact that they "had forgotten that they were a people on a journey. And when one is on a journey one always finds new things, things one does not know. And in the law, they had to accept these things in a heart faithful to the Lord". But, also in this case, "a journey is not absolute in itself, it is a journey toward an end point: toward the definitive manifestation of the Lord". After all, all of "life is a journey toward the fullness of Jesus Christ, when the second coming occurs". It is a journey toward Jesus, who will come again in glory, as the angels said to the Apostles on the day of the Ascension".

In other words, Pope Francis emphasized, repeating the words from the Gospel passage, this generation "seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah": that is to say, the Pope clarified, "the sign of the Resurrection, of glory, of that eschatology we are journeying toward". However, many of his contemporaries "were closed within themselves, not open to the God of surprises"; they were men and women who "did not know the path or even this eschatology, to the point that when, in the Sanhedrin, the priest asks Jesus: 'Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God', and Jesus says, yes, and 'you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven'. Then the high priest tore his robes and made a scandal. 'He has uttered blasphemy! Blasphemy!', he yelled". For them, the sign that Jesus gave was blasphemy.

For this reason, the Pope explained, Jesus defined them as an "evil generation", inasmuch as "they did not understand that the law they protected and loved was a pedagogy toward Jesus Christ". Indeed, "if the law does not lead to Jesus Christ, does not bring us close to Jesus Christ, it is dead". And this is why Jesus scolds the members of that generation "for being closed, for being

incapable of recognizing the signs of the times, for not being open to the God of surprises, for not being on a journey toward the Lord's triumphant finale", to the point "that when he explains it, they think it is blasphemy".

The Pope then moved on to his final instruction, to reflect on this theme, to ask oneself about these aspects: "Am I attached to my things, to my ideas, closed? Or am I open to the God of surprises?". And also: "Am I a stationary person or a person on a journey?". And finally, he concluded, "do I believe in Jesus Christ and in what he has done?", that is, "he died, rose again... do I believe that the journey goes forth toward maturity, toward the manifestation of the glory of the Lord? Am I capable of understanding the signs of the times and of being faithful to the voice of the Lord that is manifest in them?".

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