



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

A beautiful struggle

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The life of a Christian “is a military life” and it takes “strength and courage” to “withstand” the Devil’s temptations and to “proclaim” the truth. This “is a beautiful battle” because “it gives us that joy the Lord has prevailed within us”, that “great happiness”. During Thursday’s Mass at Santa Marta, reflecting on Paul’s words in the Letter to the Ephesians (6:10-20) and on his “military language”, Pope Francis referred to what theologians call “spiritual warfare”, advising that “to pursue a spiritual life, you have to fight”.

It takes “strength and courage” the Pontiff explained, for it is not a “simple confrontation” but a “continuous battle” with the “Prince of Darkness”. It is this close confrontation, the Pope indicated, which is referred to in the catechism in which “they taught us that in Christian life there are three enemies: the demon, the world and the flesh”. It’s about the everyday struggle with “greed, lust, gluttony, arrogance, pride, envy”: all vices “which are the wound of original sin”.

We could ask ourselves: “Is the salvation that Jesus gives us free?”. Yes, Francis answered, “but you have to protect it!”. And as Paul writes, to do so we have to “put on the whole armor of God” for “one cannot think of a spiritual life, a Christian life” without “withstanding temptations, without battling the Devil”.

And to think, Francis stated, they wanted us to believe “that the Devil was a myth, a figure, an idea, the idea of evil”. However, “the Devil exists and we have to fight against him”. St Paul recalls it, “the Word of God says it”, yet it seems that “we aren’t quite convinced” of this reality.

How is this “armour of God” made? The Apostle provides a few details: “Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth”. Thus, first of all, Truth is required because “the Devil is a liar, he is the father of liars”; then, Paul continues, one must put on “the breastplate of righteousness”: indeed, the Bishop of Rome explained, “we cannot be Christians without continuously working to be just”.

And also: “having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace”. In fact, “a Christian is a man or a woman of peace” and if there isn’t “peace in the heart” then there’s something wrong: it’s peace that “gives you strength for the battle”.

In the end, the Letter to the Ephesians reads: “above all taking the shield of faith”. The Pontiff paused on this detail: “One thing that would really help us would be to ask ourselves: “How is my faith? Do I believe or not? Or do I partly believe and partly not? Am I somewhat worldly and somewhat a believer?” When we recite the Creed, do we do so only in “words”? Are we aware, Francis asked, that “without faith we can’t go forward, we can’t safeguard the salvation of God?”.

Recalling a passage from Chapter nine of the Gospel of John, in which Jesus heals the young man whom the Pharisees did not believe was blind, Pope Francis pointed out that Jesus doesn’t ask the young man “Are you glad? Are you happy? Have you seen that I am good?”, but rather: “Do you believe in the Son of Man? Do you have faith?”. And every day, He asks us the same inescapable question, because “if our faith is weak, the Devil will defeat us”.

The shield of faith not only “protects us, but it also gives us life”. And with this, Paul says, we are able “to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one”. The Devil, in fact, “doesn’t cast flowers on us” but “flaming, poisonous arrows”.

The armour of a Christian, the Pope continued, also includes the “helmet of salvation”, the “sword of the Spirit” and prayer. St Paul advises: “Pray at all times”, and the Pontiff repeated: “Pray, pray”. One cannot “pursue a Christian life without vigilance”.

This is why Christian life can be considered a military life. But, the Pope stated, it is “a beautiful struggle”, because it gives us “that joy that the Lord has prevailed within us, with his freely given salvation”. Yet, Francis concluded, we are all “a bit lazy” and “we allow ourselves to be led by vices, by certain temptations”. But although “we are sinners”, we mustn’t get discouraged “because the Lord is with us, who has given us everything” and He will lead us “to even win today’s little pass”, our everyday battle.

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