



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

No fear

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Fear and sadness cause illness in people and in the Church too; they cause paralysis and selfishness, and in the end spoil the air of a community, which hangs a “forbidden” sign on its door, fearful of everything. However, a Christian sustained by the fear of God and by the Holy Spirit has the courageous attitude of joy, which in pain becomes peace. This was the Pope’s message on Friday during Mass at Santa Marta.

In the Liturgy of the Word, Francis began, “there are two powerful words that the Church has us meditate on: fear and joy”. This is seen in the Acts of the Apostles (18:9-18), when the Lord says to Paul: “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking”.

“Fear”, the Pope explained, “is an attitude that harms us, weakens us, diminishes us, even paralyzes us”. It is such that “a person in fear does nothing, doesn’t know what to do: is fearful, frightened, focused on herself so that something harmful or bad won’t happen to her”. Thus, “fear leads to selfish egocentrism and it paralyzes us”. For this very reason, “Jesus says to Paul: ‘Do not be afraid. Go on speaking’”.

Indeed, fear “is not a Christian attitude”. But “it is an attitude, we can say, of an imprisoned soul,

without freedom, which doesn't have the freedom to look ahead, to create something, to do good". Thus one who has fear keeps repeating: "No, there is this danger, there is that other one", and so on. "It's too bad, fear causes harm!", Francis again noted.

Fear must, however, be "distinguished from the fear of God, which has nothing to do with it". The fear of God, the Pontiff stated, "is holy, it is the fear of adoration before the Lord", and therefore "fear of God is a virtue". Indeed, "it does not diminish, it does not weaken, it does not paralyze"; but on the contrary, "it carries forth the mission that the Lord gives". In this regard, the Pontiff added: "The Lord, in Chapter 18 of the Gospel according to Luke, speaks of a judge who neither feared God nor had regard for anyone, and did whatever he wanted". This "is a sin: a lack of fear of God and also self-sufficiency". For "it detracts from the relationship with God as well as from adoration".

However, Francis said, "the fear of God, which is good, is one thing; but fear is another thing". Moreover, "a fearful Christian is insignificant: he is a person who doesn't understand what Jesus' message is".

The "other word" proposed by the liturgy, "after the Ascension of the Lord", is "joy". In the passage from the Gospel of John (16:20-23), "the Lord speaks of the passage from sadness to joy", preparing the disciples "for the moment of the Passion: 'you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy'". Jesus offers "the example of a woman in her hour of labour, who has great pain but afterwards, when the child is born, forgets the pain" to make room for joy. And "no one will take your joy away from you", the Lord thus assures them.

However, the Pope advised, "Christian joy is not simply enjoyment, it isn't fleeting lightheartedness". Instead, "Christian joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit: it is having one's heart ever joyful because the Lord has triumphed, the Lord reigns, the Lord is at the right hand of the Father, the Lord has looked at me and sent me and has given me his grace and has made me a child of the Father". This is what "Christian joy" really is.

A Christian, therefore, "lives in joy". But, Francis asked, "where is this joy in the saddest moments, in times of anguish? Let's think about Jesus on the Cross: did He have joy? Eh, no! But yes, He had peace!". Indeed, the Pope explained, "Joy, in the moment of anguish, of trial, becomes peace". On the other hand, "lightheartedness in a moment of anguish becomes darkness, becomes troublesome".

This is why "a Christian without joy isn't Christian; a Christian who lives continuously in sadness is not a Christian". A "Christian who loses peace in trying times, in times of illness, of so many difficulties, is missing something".

Francis urged: "do not have fear" but instead "have joy". He explained that "not having fear is

asking for the grace of courage, the courage of the Holy Spirit; and having joy is asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit, even in the most difficult times, through that peace that the Lord gives us”.

This is what “happens in Christians, happens in communities, in the entire Church, in parishes, in so many Christian communities”. Indeed “there are fearful communities that always stay on the safe side: ‘No, no, let’s not do this.... No, no, this can’t be done, we can’t do this”. At that point “it seems they have written ‘forbidden’ on the door: everything is forbidden out of fear”. Thus, “when one enters that community the air is spoiled, because the community is ill: fear makes a community ill; a lack of courage makes a community ill”.

Yet “even a community without joy is a community fallen ill, for when there is no joy there is emptiness. No, actually there is lightheartedness”. Thus, in the final analysis, “it will be a fine, lighthearted community, but worldly, ill with worldliness because it doesn’t have the joy of Jesus Christ”. And one of the effects of worldliness, the Pontiff warned, “is that of speaking ill of others”. Thus, “when the Church is fearful and when the Church doesn’t receive the joy of the Holy Spirit, the Church falls ill, the communities fall ill, the faithful fall ill”.

In the prayer at the opening of Mass, the Pope recalled, “we asked the Lord for the grace to lift us up toward Christ seated at the right hand of the Father”. This “contemplation of Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father”, Francis stated, “will give us courage, give us joy, take away our fear and help us to avoid falling into a superficial and lighthearted life”.

“With this intention to lift up our spirit toward Christ seated at the right hand of the Father”, Francis concluded, “let us continue our celebration, by asking the Lord: lift up our spirit, take away all of our fears and give us joy and peace”.