



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The caged spirit

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“Prophecy, memory and hope”: these three characteristics free a person; they free people and the Church, preventing it from ending up as a “closed system” of rules that puts the Holy Spirit in a cage. This was Pope Francis’ message at the Mass he celebrated on Monday morning, 30 May, in the Chapel of Santa Marta.

“It is clear to whom Jesus is speaking with this parable: to the chief priests, the scribes and the elders of the people”, the Pope immediately noted, referring to the Gospel passage of Mark (12:1-12) from the day’s liturgy. “For them”, the Lord uses “the image of a vineyard”, which in the Bible represents the image of God’s people, the image of the Church and also the image of our soul”. And so, Pope Francis explained, “the Lord cares for the vineyard, he surrounds it, he digs a hole for the winepress and builds a tower”.

It is precisely in this work that “all of God’s love and tenderness in making his people” can be recognized: “the Lord has always done this with so much love and tenderness”. And “he always reminds his people of when they were faithful, when they followed him in the desert and when they searched for his face”. However, “then the situation reversed and the people took hold of this gift from God”, shouting: “It is us, we are free!”. The people “did not think, they did not remember that

they were made by the hands and the heart of God, and in this way they become a people without memory, a people without prophecy and without hope”.

Therefore Jesus addresses “the leaders of the people” with “this parable: a people without memory has forgotten the gift, the present; and attributes what it is to itself: we can!”. The Bible speaks many times of “ascetics and prophets”, the Pope said, and “Jesus Himself emphasizes the importance of memory: a people who do not remember are not a people, they forget their roots, and they forget their history”.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses repeats this point several times: “You must remember, remember!”. In fact, that is “the book of the memory of the people, the people of Israel; It is the book of the Church’s memory, but it is also the book of our personal memory”. It is precisely “this Deuteronomic dimension of life — the life of a people or of one person’s life — that always returns to the roots in order to remember and to avoid making mistakes along the way”. However, the people to whom Jesus addressed the parable “had lost the memory: they had lost their memory of the gift, the gift of the God who made them”.

“Having lost the memory, they are a people who are unable to make room for the prophets”, the Pope continued. Jesus himself “tells them that they have killed the prophets, because the prophets encumber, the prophets always tell us what we do not want to hear”. And so, “Daniel complains in Babylon: ‘We, today, have no prophets!’”. These words contain the reality of “a people with no prophets”, who indicate “the way to them and remind them: the prophet is the one who takes the memory and helps you to move forward”. That is why “Jesus said to the leaders of the people: ‘You have lost your memory, and you do not have prophets. Or rather: when the profits came, you killed them!’”.

Moreover, the attitude of the people’s leaders was clear: “We have no need of prophets, we have ourselves!”. But “without memory or prophets”, the Pope warned, “they become a people without hope, a people with no horizons, a people closed in on themselves, who do not open up to the promises of God, who do not wait for God’s promises”. Therefore “a people without memory, without prophecy and without hope: this is what the chief priests, the scribes and the elders made of the people of Israel”.

And “where is the faith?”, asked Pope Francis. “In the crowd”, he replied, stressing that in the Gospel we read: “They tried to capture him, but they feared the crowd”. Those people, in fact, “understood the truth and, in the midst of their sins, they had memory, they were open to prophecy and sought hope”. An example, in this respect, is seen in “two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, people of memory, prophecy and hope”.

However, “the leaders of the people” legitimized their thoughts by surrounding themselves with “lawyers, doctors of the law, who used a legal system that is closed”. “I believe”, the Pope said,

“that they had nearly 600 commandments”. In this manner, their thinking was “closed and secure”, with the idea that “those who do this will be saved; the others do not interest us, memory does not interest us”. With regard to “the prophecy: it is better that the prophets do not come”. And “hope? Well, everyone will see it”. This “is the system they used to justify: the doctors of the law, the theologians who always choose the path of case studies and do not allow the freedom of the Holy Spirit; They do not recognize God’s gift, the gift of the Spirit, and they put the Spirit in a cage, because they do not allow prophecy in hope”.

This is precisely “the religious system Jesus is speaking of”. A system “of corruption, worldliness and concupiscence”, as we see in the passage taken from the second Letter of Peter (1:2-7), in the first reading. Even Jesus himself “was tempted to lose the memory of his mission, to not make room for the prophecy, and to choose security over hope”. In this context the Pope recalled “the three temptations in the desert: ‘Perform a miracle and show your power!’; ‘Throw yourself from the temple so that everyone will believe!’; ‘Worship me!’”.

“Since Jesus himself knew the temptation” of a “closed system”, he reproaches these people “for going halfway around the world in order to have a proselyte” and make him a “slave”. And in this way “this organized people, this organized Church, makes slaves”. So much so that “we understand Paul’s reaction, when he speaks about slavery of the law and of freedom that gives you grace”. Because “a people is free, a Church is free when she remembers, when she makes a place for the prophets, when she does not lose hope”.

“The Lord teaches us this lesson for our own lives too”, Pope Francis said in conclusion, suggesting that we ask ourselves through a genuine examination of conscience: “Do I remember the wonders that the Lord has done in my life? Do I remember the Lord’s gifts? Am I capable of opening my heart to the prophets, to what they say to me: ‘This is wrong, you have to go there, move forward, take a risk’, as the prophets did? Am I open to that or am I afraid, preferring to lock myself in the law’s cage?’. And finally: “Do I hope in God’s promises, like our father Abraham did, who left his home without knowing where he was going, only because he hoped in God?”.