



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Three graces

Tuesday, 27 September 2016

(by www.osservatoreromano.va)

“To recognize spiritual desolation, to pray when we experience this state of spiritual desolation and to know how to accompany people who are suffering difficult times of sadness and spiritual desolation”. In his homily at the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning, 27 September, Pope Francis recommended that we ask the Lord for these three graces.

Offering the Eucharistic celebration, on the feast of St Vincent de Paul, for the Sisters of the community at Santa Marta — “who were founded” by the French Saint — the Pope focused his reflection on the first reading in particular, taken from the Book of Job (3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23). This man “was in trouble” because “he had lost everything. All of his possessions, and even his children. He was also suffering from an illness similar to leprosy: difficult, full of wounds”. In short, “his suffering was so great” that “at a certain point, he opened his mouth and cursed the day, what had happened to him”, saying: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, ‘a man-child is conceived’. It would have been better if I had not been, if I had not happened. Death is better than to live like this”.

However, the Pontiff noted, “the Bible says that Job was a just man, he was holy”. And a saint usually “cannot do these things”. In fact, the Pope explained, Job “did not curse God. He only

vented, this was an outlet: the way a son vents before his Father". A bit like the prophet Jeremiah did, as was written in Chapter 20 of his Book in the Old Testament: "He begins with something so beautiful", Francis noted, "he says to the Lord: 'I have been seduced by You, Oh Lord'"; but immediately after, as Job did, Jeremiah says: "Cursed is the day on which I was conceived". Yet "these two cases are not blasphemy: they are outbursts". Both "vent before God in this way", because "they were both in a great spiritual desolation".

In this regard, the Pope stressed that spiritual desolation is "something that happens to everyone: it can be strong, or weak ... But, that state of the dark soul, without hope, wary, without the will to live, without seeing the end of the tunnel, with so much unrest in one's heart and also in one's ideas", every woman and every man experiences this. "Spiritual desolation", he said, "makes us feel as if the soul has been crushed", and "does not want to live: Job's outcry is 'Death is better!', that death is better than to live like this".

However, the Pope said, "when our spirit is in this state of enlarged sadness, and there is almost no breath, we must understand" that this "happens to everyone": to various degrees, but it happens to everyone. Hence the invitation to "understand what is happening in our heart", to ask yourself "what you should do when you experience these dark moments, of a tragedy in the family, an illness, something that knocks you down". Certainly, he clarified, it is not a matter of "taking a pill in order to sleep and escape from the facts, or having two, three, or four drinks" so as to forget, because "this does not help". Rather, "the liturgy today shows us how" to conduct ourselves amidst "this spiritual desolation, when we are worn down and hopeless".

Help is offered in the Responsorial Psalm: "Let my prayer come into your presence, O Lord". So the first thing to do is to pray. "A prayer that is strong, strong, strong", Francis repeated, highlighting that "we have recited Psalm 87 together", which teaches you "how to pray, how to pray during times of spiritual desolation, of interior darkness, when things do not go well and sadness comes into the heart so strongly. "Lord, God of my salvation, before You I cry day and night": these words are powerful! This is what Job did: 'I cry, day and night. Please, turn your ear to my supplication'". In short, "it is a prayer" that consists of "knocking on the door, but forcefully: 'Lord, I am full of misfortunes. My life is on the brink of hell. I am counted among those who go down into the pit, I am now like a man without strength'".

In life, the Pope observed, "many times we feel so powerless". But "the Lord Himself teaches us how to pray in these difficult times: 'Lord, you have thrown me into the deepest pit. Your fury weighs upon me. Let my prayer come to you'. This is the prayer: this is how we ought to pray in the moments that are most difficult, darkest, most desolate, most crushed, those moments that crush us", urged Francis. Because "this is to pray with authenticity" and, in some way, it also helps "to let off steam as Job vented about the children. As a son".

After indicating the individual behaviour we ought to have in times of spiritual desolation, the Pope

then focused on assisting other people who find themselves in similar situations. The biblical passage, in fact, continues with the story of the friends who went to visit Job and “remained in silence, for a long time”. In fact, the Pope explained, “before a person who is in this situation, words can hurt. Only touch him, be close”, in a way that makes him “feel the closeness, and to answer his questions; but don’t give speeches”.

In the case of Job, however, “you see that these friends, after some time, are bored with the silence”, and they begin “to give speeches, and to speak nonsense”. Whereas “when a person suffers, when a person is in spiritual desolation, you must speak as little as possible and you must help, through silence, closeness, caresses, his prayer before the Father”.

Francis expressed the hope “that the Lord will help us: firstly, to recognize within us those moments of spiritual desolation, when we are in the dark, without hope, and to ask ourselves why; secondly, to pray in times of darkness, as the liturgy teaches us today with Psalm 87 — ‘Let my prayer come into your presence, O Lord’”. And thirdly, “when I draw near to someone who is suffering”, either from an illness or any other circumstance, “who is truly undergoing desolation: silence”. Silence, he concluded, “with a lot of love, closeness, and embraces. Not to give speeches, which ultimately do not help and even do harm”.