



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The astonished innkeeper

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(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

How did Jesus teach with an authority that “astonished” and conquered, while the scribes and the doctors of law could only impose laws, but “not enter the hearts of the people”? Pope Francis’ reflection during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning, 10 January illustrated the differences between the “real authority” of Jesus, and the “formal authority” of the others. The eloquent comparison encourages us to reflect on the danger to those who are called “to teach the truth” and who can fall into the temptation of “clericalism” instead of following the path of “closeness to the people”.

The Pope was inspired by a passage taken from the Gospel of the day (Mk 1: 21-28) in which it is said that “they were astonished”. Why this “astonishment”? asked the Pope. “Because of the way in which Jesus taught”, he replied, adding that Jesus “taught them as one who has authority, and not as the scribes, that is, the doctors of the law”. Indeed, all of those people did teach, “but they did not enter the heart of the people” and therefore had no authority.

Authority, the Pope explained, is a recurring theme in the Gospel. We see this in particular, when Jesus finds himself “questioned, many times” by the doctors of the law, the Pharisees, priests and scribes: “but by what authority do you do this? Tell us! You have no authority to do this! We have

the authority". At the base of this query, explained Francis, lies "the problem of formal authority and real authority". While the scribes and Pharisees enjoyed "formal authority", Jesus had "real authority". But, the Pope added, "not because he was a seducer". In fact, if it is true that Jesus brought a "new teaching", it is also true that "Jesus himself said he was teaching the law down to the last detail". The novelty, compared to the doctors of law, lay in the fact that "Jesus was teaching the truth, but with authority".

Thus, it is important to understand in what lies "the difference of this authority". The Pope clarified this by explaining the characteristics of real authority. "First of all, " the Pope stressed, "Jesus' authority was a humble authority. Jesus taught with humility". He bore the characteristics of "servitude", to the extent that he advised his disciples to act in the same way: "Those who rule nations lord it over them, but it shall not be so among you. Let the greatest be the one who serves: he shall become the least, and he shall be the greatest". Jesus, therefore, "served the people; he explained things so that the people could clearly understand. He was at the service of the people. He had the manner of a servant and this gave him authority".

On the contrary, the doctors of the law "had the mindset of princes", and they thought: "we are the teachers, the princes, and we teach you. Not service: we command; you obey". Therefore, even if people listened to and respected [them], "they did not feel that the [doctors of the law] had authority over them". Jesus however, "never passed by like a prince; he was always the servant of all and this is what gave him authority".

A second characteristic "of Jesus' authority", the Pope added, "was closeness". The Gospel reads: "Jesus was close to the people, was among the people" and the people themselves "would not let him leave". The Lord "was not allergic to the people. Touching lepers, the sick, did not disgust him". And this "being close to the people", Francis stressed, "gives authority".

The comparison with the doctors, scribes and priests is evident. They "distance themselves from the people, in their hearts they despise the poor, uneducated people". They loved to set themselves apart, walking "in the squares, well dressed, in luxurious robes". They, explained the Pope, "have a clerical mindset: they taught with a clerical authority". Jesus instead "was very close to the people" and this gave him authority.

In this regard, the Pope recalled the closeness to the people that "Blessed Paul VI possessed". An example, he said, that can be found in number 48 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, where we recognize "the heart of the close pastor: therein lies the authority of this Pope: closeness".

Picking up where he left off, Francis summarized the characteristics of Jesus' authority. He explained that Jesus "overturned everything, like an iceberg. We see the tip of the iceberg; instead, Jesus overturned it and the people are at the top, and He who commands is below, and commands from below". Secondly, there is "closeness". And lastly, there is a "third distinction" with

respect to the doctors of law: “consistency”. Jesus, observed the Pope, “was consistent; he lived as he preached. There was a kind of unity, a harmony, between what he thought, felt and did”. Something that cannot be found in the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees: “Their personality was split to the point that Jesus advised his disciples: ‘Do as they say, but not as they do’. They would say one thing and do another”. Jesus often described them as hypocrites. And “one who feels like a prince, who has a ‘clericalistic’ attitude, who is a hypocrite, does not have authority. He will speak the truth, but without authority. Instead, Jesus, who is humble, who serves, who is close, who does not despise people, has authority”. This, said the Pontiff, is the kind of authority that “the People of God sense”.

It is the kind of authority that astonishes and wins over hearts. To underline this concept, at the conclusion of the homily, Pope Francis drew attention to the parable of the Good Samaritan, whom he described as an “image of Jesus”, and briefly summarized the well-known gospel passage. “There’s that man there: knocked down, beaten, left half dead in the middle of the street by bandits”. And when the priest passes by, “he goes around him because there is blood and he thinks: ‘The law says that if I touch blood, I will be unclean ... no, no, I will leave’”. Later, when the Levite passes by, he probably thought: “If I become involved in this, I will need to go to court tomorrow, to testify, and tomorrow I have many things to do, I must ... no, no, no...”. And so he goes away.

Later, the Samaritan arrives, “a sinner, from a different people”. He instead “has pity for this man, and does all that we know about”. But, added Francis, in the parable “there is a fourth character: the innkeeper”, who “was astonished; astonished not by the poor man’s injuries, because he knew there were bandits on that path, on that road”; and not by the behaviour of the priest and the Levite, “because he knew them and knew that was their way of acting”. The innkeeper is “astonished by that Samaritan”, not understanding his choice to stop and help. Perhaps the innkeeper thought: “‘this man is crazy! But he is also a foreigner; he is not Jewish, he is a sinner... But he is crazy, I do not understand’”!

“This,” concluded the Pope, “is the astonishment”: the same “astonishment of the people” before Jesus, “because his authority was a humble authority, one of service; it was an authority close to the people and it was a consistent authority”.