



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The tongue can also kill

Thursday, 13 June 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 25, 19 June 2013)

Anger and the verbal abuse of our brothers or sisters can kill. Pope Francis reminded the faithful of this at Mass early on Thursday morning, 13 June, in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae. He was commenting on the Gospel of the day's liturgy (Mt 5:20-26) in which it says that anyone who is angry with his brother is liable for judgement.

Several Argentine diplomats had come to be with the Pope on the day marking three months since his election. In the front row were personnel of the Argentine Embassies to the Holy See and to Italy; the country's representatives at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and at the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta; and staff of the Milan and Rome offices of the Argentine Consulate.

Referring to St John who said that anyone who expresses resentment or hatred for his brother or sister is in fact a murderer at heart, Pope Francis stressed the need to enter into the logic of perfecting or "reviewing our conduct". Of course, he said, addressing the faithful in Spanish, this calls to mind the subject "of discrediting our brother or sister, starting with our inner passions. In practice this is motivation for insult". Furthermore, the Pope pointed out with a touch of irony how widespread recourse to "marvellously imaginative" insults is in "the Latin tradition", for "we invent

one insult after another”.

As long as the “epithet is friendly let it go”, the Pope continued. However “the problem arises when there is another epithet” that veers towards the offensive. “We then go and qualify it with a series of definitions that are not exactly evangelical”. Verbal abuse, he said, “is a way of taking people down a peg”.

“There is no need to go to a psychiatrist to know that when people do someone else down it is because they themselves are unable to develop and need to feel that the other is less important in order for them to feel that they count”. What Jesus simply said was quite the opposite the Holy Father continued: “do not speak badly of others, do not belittle them, do not discredit them; basically we are all walking on the same path”.

With regard to insulting, the Pope pointed out that Jesus is even more radical and “goes much further”. For he says that when “you begin to feel something negative in your heart” against one of your brethren and express it “with an insult, a curse or an outburst of anger, something is wrong. You must convert, you must change”.

Concerning this Pope Francis recalled the Apostle James who says that “ships are guided by a rudder and people are guided by their tongue”. So if someone “is unable to control his tongue, he or she is lost”. This is man’s weakness.

“Cain’s natural aggression towards his brother has been repeated in the course of history. It is not that we are wicked; we are weak and sinful”. This explains why “it is far easier to solve a situation with an insult, with slander, with mud-slinging, rather than with kind words, as Jesus says”.

Lastly, the Pontiff asked the Lord for the grace for all “to be a little more careful with their tongue regarding what we say of others”. This is without a doubt “a small penance, but it yields good fruits”. It is true that it demands sacrifice and effort, since it is far easier to enjoy “the fruit of a racy comment against another”. In the long run this “hunger is rewarding and does us good”. Hence our need to ask the Lord for the grace to “conform our life to this new law, which is the law of docility, the law of love, the law of peace”. We must start by “pruning our language a little, by cutting back a bit our comments about others or the explosions that lead us to insulting them and flaring up in anger”.