



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The eve of the Apostle's life

Friday, 18 October 2013

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Pope Francis commented on the liturgical readings of the day taken from St Paul's Second Letter to Timothy (4:10-17) and from the Gospel of St Luke (10:1-9). The Pope began by noting the contrast between the two Scripture passages. The Gospel, he said, speaks to us about the “beginning of the apostolic life”; when the disciples were called they were “young, strong and joyful”; while in his Second Letter to Timothy, St Paul who “had reached the twilight of life” reflects on the end of his apostolic mission. Pope Francis explained that the two passages teach us that every apostle experiences a joyful, enthusiastic beginning, with God within, and yet this does not spare him from the end.

Pope Francis illustrated the point by focusing on the three iconic figures of Moses, John the Baptist and Paul. When Moses was young, he “was the courageous leader of God's people who struggled against the people's enemies and even with God to save them... but in the end he is alone on Mount Nebo looking towards the promised land” he would never enter.

John the Baptist, too, was spared neither anguish nor distress at the end of his life. The great forerunner questioned if he had made a mistake, if he had taken the wrong path, and he even asked his friends to go to Jesus and ask him “are you the one or must we wait for another?”.

Indeed, at the end of his life “the greatest man born of woman” — as Christ himself had called him — “was subjected to the power of a weak, drunken and corrupt governor, an adulterous woman's envy and a dancer's whim”.

Finally, in his Letter to Timothy, Paul confides his bitter disappointment to his spiritual son. “He was not in the seventh heaven”, the Pope remarked. Writing to Timothy, the Apostle confided: “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me; Crescens has gone to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for his is very useful to me; bring the cloak that I left, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message”. Pope Francis then cited Paul's own account of his trial: “At my first defence no one took my part; all deserted me. But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the Gospel fully”. St Paul, Pope Francis said, iconically captures the eve of every apostle's life: “alone, abandoned, betrayed”; helped only by the Lord who “does not abandon, who does not betray”, since “he is faithful, and he cannot deny himself”.

Pope Francis then remarked that the greatness of the Apostle consisted in conforming his life to the words of the Baptist: “He must increase and I must decrease”. In fact, the apostle is precisely one “who gives his life so that the Lord might increase, and then he comes to the end of his life”. Even to St Peter the Lord said: “when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go”.

Reflecting on the final phase of the lives of these great figures, Pope Francis continued, made him think of homes for elderly priests and religious sisters which he called “shrines of apostolic life and holiness”. In these homes, he said, one will find “good elderly priests and sisters who live under the weight of solitude, and who wait for the Lord to come to knock at the door of their hearts”. Unfortunately, he said, we tend to forget about these shrines: “they are not beautiful places, because there we see what awaits us”. However, he said, “if we look at them more deeply, they are beautiful” because they house a wealth of humanity. To visit one is to “make a true pilgrimage to a place of apostolic life and holiness”. “These sisters and priests wait for the Lord a little like St Paul did: they are a bit sad, it is true, but they also have a certain peace, their faces shine with joy”.

The Holy Father concluded by asking the Lord to watch over the priests and religious who have reached the evening of life so that they might say once more to the Lord: “yes, Lord, I want to follow you”.
