



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

When man tries to save himself

Thursday, 19 December 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 1, 3 January 2014)

Man cannot save himself, and those who have had the pride to try, even Christians, have failed. For only God can grant life and salvation. This was the heart of Pope Francis' homily at Holy Mass on Thursday morning at the Chapel of Santa Marta.

The Pope drew upon the Readings of the day to remind those present that "the capacity to bestow life and salvation come only from the Lord". "Many times", he said, "the Scriptures speak about barren women, about sterility, about the inability to conceive and give life". And yet many times "a miracle of the Lord" occurs and "these barren women are given to have a child".

Pope Francis pointed to the example of Samson's mother, whose story is recounted in the day's first Reading from the Book of Judges (13:2-7,24-25a). He then recalled what happened to Sarah, the wife of our father Abraham: "she could not believe" that she could have a son at her advanced age "and she laughed behind the door of the tent where she was listening to what her husband was saying; she laughed because she could not believe it, but she had a son".

Today's Gospel (Lk 1:5-25), the Holy Father continued, reminds us of "what happened to Elizabeth". These biblical stories about barren women show how "life is brought forth from the

impossibility of giving life". The Pope then noted that this also occurred with women who perhaps were not barren, but who no longer had any hope for their lives. "We think of Noemi, who ultimately had a grandchild". Essentially, he said, "the Lord intervenes in the lives of these women to tell us: I am able to give life".

Pope Francis then noted how the image of the desert is repeatedly used by the prophets. "The desert, arid land which is incapable of bringing forth a tree, fruit, or of making anything blossom". And yet this very desert, he said, becomes a forest. "The prophets say: it shall be great, it will flourish!". "The desert can flourish" and "the barren woman can give life" only through the Lord's promise: I can do it! I can bring forth life and salvation from your barrenness! I can make fruit to grow from your aridity! It is the intervention of God that makes us fruitful, that gives us the ability to give life, that helps us along the path of holiness".

One thing is certain, the Pope said: "we cannot save ourselves by ourselves". "Even many Christians" have tried it, but only God's intervention brings us salvation.

"What must we do for our part then?", the Pope asked. First "we must recognize our own barrenness, our inability to bring forth life". Then "we must ask," saying to the Lord: "Lord, I want to be fruitful, I want my life to give life, I want my faith to be fruitful and to go forward and to give life to others. Lord, I am barren; I cannot do it, but you can. I am a desert; I cannot not do it, but you can". This, he said, "should be our prayer in the days leading up to Christmas".

Pope Francis then recalled how "the proud, those who believe they can do everything by themselves, are struck down". The Pope pointed to Michal, the daughter of Saul. "She was a woman", he said, "who was not sterile, but she was proud, and was not able to understand what it was to praise God, and in fact laughed at the praise that David gave to the Lord. And she was punished with sterility. Humility is necessary for fruitfulness. How many people like her imagine that they are just, and in the end they are poor souls".

Humility, Pope Francis said, is what is truly important, the ability to say to the Lord: "Lord, I am barren, I am a desert". And he concluded: "how important are the beautiful O Antiphons that the Church has us pray over the course of these days: O Son of David, O Adonai, O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Emmanuel, come and give us life, come and save us, for only You can, alone I cannot. It is with this humility, the humility of the desert, the humility of the barren soul, that we receive grace: the grace to blossom, to bear fruit and to give life".