



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Four models

Tuesday, 14 January 2014

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the readings of the day taken from the first Book of Samuel (1:9-20) and the Gospel of Mark (1:21b-28). The Pope noted that the readings contain “four models of preachers: Jesus, the scribes, Eli the priest, and ... the two sons of Eli, who were also priests”.

The scribes taught and preached yet placed heavy burdens on the people, “and the poor people could not go forward”, the Pope said. Jesus reproves them for not helping them, and he says to the people: “Practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do”. The scribes and pharisees acted as though “they were cudgeling the people”, the Pope added. Jesus therefore admonishes them, saying: “You shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in”.

Pope Francis then reflected on the second model of a preacher, the priest Eli. “He was a poor old man, but I have a certain affection for him”, he said. “He was not truly a good man: he was a poor priest, weak, lukewarm and he let things go, he wasn’t strong. He let his sons get away with many unpleasant things”. The Pope noted as an example Eli’s mistaking Hannah for a drunken woman, when she was praying in silence, only moving her lips as she asked the Lord for the gift of a child.

“She was praying as humble people do, simply, from the heart, with anguish and moving her lips. Many good women pray in our churches and shrines in this way. And this is how she was praying, asking for a miracle. And the aged Eli, poor old man ... observed her, thinking: this is a drunken woman. And he looked down on her. He was the representative of the faith “who should have taught the faith, but “he looked down on this woman,” the Pope said. He tells her: go away, drunken woman!”.

“How often do God’s people feel unloved by those who should bear witness to the faith, by Christians, by lay Christians, by priests, by bishops!”. Returning to Eli, Pope Francis explained why he has a certain sympathy for him: “because in his heart he still had the anointing. When the woman explains her situation to him, Eli tells her: ‘Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him’. His priestly anointing shows through. Poor man, he had it hidden under his laziness. He was lukewarm. Poor man!”

The Pope then reflected on Eli’s sons. His sons are not seen, the Pope observed, but they were charged with managing the temple. “They were brigands; they were priests, but they were brigands. They went after power and money; they exploited the people, they profited from alms and gifts. The Bible says that they took the best pieces of the sacrifices for themselves to eat. They were exploiters. The Lord severely punished these two!”

Pope Francis likened the sons of Eli to “the corrupt Christian, the corrupt layperson, the corrupt priest, the corrupt bishop. They take advantage of the situation, of the privilege of faith, of being a Christian. And their hearts become corrupt. We think of Judas: perhaps it was through jealousy and envy that he began to dip his hand into the purse” and “thus his heart began to be corrupted. John — the beloved Apostle who loved the whole world, who preached love — says of Judas: he is a thief. Full stop. It’s clear: he was corrupt. And from a corrupt heart betrayal also comes. He betrays Jesus”.

Pope Francis then contrasted Jesus’ way of preaching. What was so special about his preaching? The Gospel says that the people “were astonished by his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes”. Jesus, the Pope said, “taught the Law, he taught Moses and the Prophets. So what was so new? He had power, the power of holiness, unclean spirits fled from him. He was close to sinners, he dined with Matthew, a robber, a traitor to the homeland; he forgave the adulterous woman whom the law would have severely punished; he talked about theology with the Samaritan, who was no ‘angel’, she had her story as well”. In short, he said, Jesus “looked into people’s hearts, Jesus drew near to people’s wounded hearts. Jesus was only interested in the person and in God. And he sought to bring God close to people and people close to God”.

The Pope continued: “Jesus is like the Good Samaritan who heals the wounds of life. Jesus is the intercessor who goes away alone to pray for people on the mountain, and he gives his life for

people. Jesus wants people to draw close and he seeks them out; and he is moved when he sees them like sheep without a shepherd. All of this is what the people describe as a new attitude. No, it is not a new teaching, it is a way of making it new. Evangelical transparency”.

“Let us ask the Lord,” Pope Francis concluded, “that these two readings may help us in our Christian lives not to become corrupt like the sons of Eli; not to be lukewarm like Eli; but to be like Jesus, with that zeal to seek out people, to heal people, to love people”.