



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Martyrdom is not just a thing of the past

Tuesday, 4 March 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 10, 7 March 2014)

Pope Francis reflected on the day's Gospel from the evangelist Mark (10:28-31). The Pope began: "Jesus had just finished speaking about the perils of riches and about how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and Peter asks this question: 'We have left everything and followed you. What shall we receive in return?'. Jesus replies: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands...".

Perhaps, the Pope suggested, Peter was thinking: "this is a good business venture, following Jesus is very profitable, we profit a hundredfold". However, Jesus "adds three little words: 'with persecutions besides'. And in the age to come eternal life". Essentially he was saying: "yes, you have left everything and you will receive many things here on earth, but with persecutions. This is the Christian's recompense and this is the path of whoever wishes to follow Jesus. For it is the path that he trod: he was persecuted".

It is the path of self-emptying, the same path that St Paul indicated to the Philippians when he said that Jesus, in becoming man, emptied himself unto death on the Cross. "This is the tone of the Christian life", and yet it is a path of joy. In fact, the Pope said, "following Jesus is a joy; in the beatitudes Jesus says: blessed are you when they shall insult you, when you are persecuted for

my name's sake".

Persecution, then, is one of the beatitudes, the Pope said. So much so that "the disciples, immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit, began to preach and to be persecuted. Peter was imprisoned; Stephen bore witness by his death. And there have been so many other witnesses down to the present day. The Cross is always present on the Christian path".

Certainly, Pope Francis noted, we will have many men and women religious, "many mothers, many fathers, many brothers and sisters in the Church, in the Christian community. And this is beautiful. But we will also have persecutions, because the world does not tolerate Christ's divinity, it does not tolerate the preaching of the Gospel, it does not tolerate the beatitudes". Hence the persecution, which at times is carried out through words, through slander. So it was for the early Christians, who endured defamation and suffered imprisonment".

"But we so easily forget", the Pope said. "Let us think of the many Christians who just 60 years ago were placed in camps, in Nazi and Communist prisons: so many, only because they were Christians". And this is also taking place today, he added, despite our conviction that we have reached a certain degree of civility and a more mature culture.

"I tell you that today there are more martyrs than in the early times of the Church", Pope Francis said. "Many of our brothers and sisters who bear witness to Jesus are persecuted for it. They are condemned for having a Bible. They cannot wear the sign of the Cross". This is "the path that Jesus trod, but it is a joyous path because the Lord never allows us to be tried beyond what we are able to bear".

"The Christian life is not a commercial venture", the Pope said. It is simply the "following of Jesus, and this is what happens when we follow Jesus. Let us consider whether we have within ourselves the desire to be courageous in bearing witness to Jesus". And he added: "let us also think ... about our many brothers and sisters today who cannot pray together because they are persecuted for it, who cannot have the book of the Gospels or a Bible because they are persecuted for it. Let us think about these brothers and sisters who cannot go to Mass because it is prohibited. How many times a priest secretly comes among them pretending to be at table having tea, and he secretly celebrates the Mass. This is happening today".

In conclusion, the Pope therefore issued this invitation to those present: "let us consider: am I ready to carry the Cross like Jesus? To endure persecution in order to bear witness to Jesus like our many brothers and sisters today who are humiliated and persecuted? Considering this will do us all good".

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