



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The nameless man

Thursday, 20 March 2014

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the day's Readings from the Prophet Jeremiah (17:5-10) and the Gospel of Luke (16:19-31).

The two readings invite us to trust in God and not in ourselves, the Pope said. "Today's first reading begins with a curse: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man' (Jer 17:5)". He then noted that "the same curse exists in other passages of the Bible, although perhaps phrased differently, for example: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in himself'", adding that the man who trusts in his own strength is always cursed "because he bears a curse within himself".

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord", the Pope continued. The prophet says of him: "he is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit".

"This image makes us think of Jesus' words concerning one's house," the Pope said. "Happy is the man who builds his house upon the rock, he shall stand secure. But unhappy is the man who builds his house upon sand, since he lacks a firm foundation". Today, therefore, "God's word teaches us that only our trust in Jesus is secure: other trusts are useless, they do not save us, they do not give life, they do not give joy". Indeed, "they bring us death and drought".

We all agree on this clear teaching, the Pope said. “Our problem” as the Scriptures tell us, “is that our hearts are treacherous”. Thus, even though we realize we making a mistake, “still we like to trust in ourselves or trust in a particular friend, or trust in a good situation, or trust in an ideology”. We follow that tendency to decide where to place “our trust, leaving the Lord aside”.

“But why is the man who trusts in man and in himself cursed?,” the Pope asked. “Because that sort of trust causes him to look only at himself; it causes him to withdraw into himself, without horizons, without open doors, without windows”. He becomes “a man who is closed in on himself” and “who will not be saved”, since “man cannot save himself”.

The Pope then turned to the day’s Gospel from St Luke, in which the evangelist recounts the parable of “a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day, and who was leading the good life”. Pope Francis observed that “he was so content that he failed to realize that Lazarus lay at the door of his home covered in sores: a poor homeless man, and like a good homeless man he had a dog”. Lazarus “lay there, hungry, and he ate only what fell from the rich man’s table: crumbs”. The Pope remarked: “Perhaps when Jesus was recounting this parable, he was thinking of the Canaanite woman who begged him to restore her daughter’s health: she only asked for the crumbs” that are given to the dogs.

The Gospel account of Lazarus and the rich man causes us to reflect, Pope Francis said. “We know the homeless man’s name: his name was Lazarus. But what was the rich man’s name? He doesn’t have a name!”. This “is the most powerful curse” for the person who “trusts in himself or in the strength and human abilities rather than in God: he loses his name!”. Such a man, when asked his name, responds not with his own proper name but by pointing to his possessions, his “property and villas”, or “to things, to idols”.

“Looking at these two men,” the Pope continued, “to the poor man with a name who trusts in the Lord; and the rich man who has lost his name and who trusts in himself, we can say: it is true, we need to trust in the Lord!”. And yet, he said, “we all have this weakness, this frail tendency to place our hopes in ourselves or in our friends or in human possibilities alone, and we forget the Lord”. It is a frame of mind that leads us “down the road of unhappiness” far away from the Lord. This, Pope Francis said, is the authentic meaning of the biblical expression: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord; cursed is the man who trusts in himself or in human abilities”.

This reflection is especially fitting for Lent, the Pope said. “And so today we would do well to ask ourselves: Where do I place my trust? Have I placed it in the Lord or am I a pagan who trusts in things, in idols that I have fashioned? Do I still have a name, or have I begun to lose my name and to identify myself only as “I” with all its variations: “me, with me, for me, only me: always egoism, I!”. This way of living, the Pope said, will most certainly “not bring us salvation”.

And yet the Gospel offers “a door of hope to all those who have rooted themselves in a trust in

man and in themselves, who have lost their name”. “In the end, in the end, there is always a way”, he said. The rich man himself bears witness to this. “When he realizes that he has lost his name, that he has lost everything, he raises his eyes and speaks a single word: ‘Father!’. And God responds with one single word: ‘Son!’”. Thus, for those who have placed “their trust in man, in themselves, and who have lost their name and dignity, there still remains the possibility of speaking this word, which is far greater than magic, far greater and more powerful: ‘Father!’”. We know that “he is always waiting for us, waiting to open a door that we do not see, and he will say to us: ‘My child!’”.

Pope Francis concluded: “May the Lord grant us all the wisdom to trust only in him and not in things or in human strength: only in him”. He also prayed for all those who have lost this trust, that God might grant them “at least the light” to perceive and pronounce “this word that saves, that opens a door and enables us to hear the voice of the Father who calls us: ‘My child!’”.