



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

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DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Why do I follow Jesus?

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Pope Francis commented on the day's Reading from the Gospel of John (6:22-29). There the Evangelist recounts how the crowd, whose hunger was satisfied through Jesus' miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fish, go looking for him "on the other side of the sea". The Pope introduced his homily by noting how Jesus "draws the crowd's attention to attitudes which are not good and which, indeed, can be harmful".

After the multiplication of the loaves, "the people were rejoicing" at the miracle Jesus performed. They even "wanted make him king", the Pope said. Yet "he withdrew alone; he went to the mountain to pray. Then the people, who followed him from the heart, who loved him, and who knew that Jesus was elsewhere, went looking for him. Jesus admonished them for this attitude: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves'; as though he had said to them: 'you seek me out of some self-interest'". The Pope then remarked: "I think it is always beneficial for us to ask ourselves: Why do I seek Jesus? Why do I follow Jesus?"

"We are all sinners", the Pope said. Therefore, we always have some interest, something "that needs to be purified in the way we follow Jesus; we have to work interiorly to follow him for his own sake, for love".

However, the people whom the Gospel describes also loved Jesus. “The truly love him”, the Pope said; for “he spoke as one who had authority”. Nevertheless, there were also advantages. “In my own following of Jesus,” the Pope asked, “do I look for something which is not really Jesus? Do I have a right intention or not?”. The answer can be discovered by consider the Lord’s teaching, for he “notes three attitudes that are harmful in following him and in seeking God”.

The first is vanity. Here Pope Francis referred to Jesus’ admonitions contained in the Gospel of Matthew (6:3-5; 16-17): “when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”. And again: “when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret”. And finally: “when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites”, but “anoint your head and wash your face” that your fasting may not be seen. Pope Francis noted that Jesus directed this admonition “especially to the leaders who wanted to be seen, because they liked to show off.... And they behaved like real peacocks” the Pope said. But Jesus says: No, this is not all right! Vanity is not all right!”.

Sometimes we too “do things in order to be seen”. Yet vanity is dangerous, the Pope said, because it can make us slide into pride, and when this happens “it’s all over”. We must therefore always ask ourselves: “Why am I doing these things? The good things that I do, do I do them in a hidden way or to be seen?” If Jesus says this to leaders, to heads, it is as though “he said it to us, to pastors. A vain pastor does not benefit the people of God”. The leaders of whom Jesus speaks in the Gospel loved to dress in luxurious clothing, the Pope said. And he confided that when he sees “a pastor, a priest, a bishop along the streets dressed majestically, as though he were at a worldly reception” he asks himself: “What do the people think of this? That pastor is not following Jesus; be he a priest or bishop, he is not following Jesus. He follows him a little, but he loves vanity”.

Jesus likewise admonishes those who are motivated by a desire for power. “Some follow Jesus because unconsciously they are seeking power”, the Pope explained. He recalled the request of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who wanted a place of power once Jesus had come into the promised kingdom. “In the Church there are climbers, and there are lots of them,” the Pope remarked. It would be better for them “to go north and become mountain climbers! It’s healthier! But don’t come to Church to climb!”. Jesus “admonished these climbers who were seeking power. He says to James and John, who loved him very much, but who were looking for power: you do not know what you are asking for, you do not know.

The desire for power even among Jesus’ own disciples lasts up until the final moment, the Pope said, until the moment when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven. They thought that the kingdom was about to come, and their question to the Lord was: “Is the kingdom coming, the moment of our power?”. Only when the Holy Spirit descends upon them do the disciples understand and change their ways. Yet in our Christian lives, the Pope noted, “sin remains, and it therefore does us good to ask ourselves: Why do I follow Jesus? For his sake alone, even to the

cross, or am I seeking power and using the Church, the Christian community, the parish, the diocese to possess a little power?”.

The third thing “that distances us from a right intention is money”, the Pope continued. In fact, there are “those who follow Jesus for money, and with money. They seek to profit financially from the parish, the diocese, the Christian community, the hospital, the college.... Let us think about the first Christian community which had the same temptation, Simon, Ananias, and Saffira.... This temptation was there from the beginning. And we have known so many good Catholics, good Christians, friends, benefactors of the Church, who have even received various honours. Then it turned out that they did rather shady deals. They were real profiteers and they made a lot of money. They presented themselves as benefactors of the Church, but they were taking a lot of money, and not always clean money”.

The Pope then repeated the question: “Why do I follow Jesus? ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves’. Is there vanity in my following of Jesus? Is the desire for power present? Is the desire for money present? It will do us good to examine our hearts and our consciences a little on the need to have a right intention in following Jesus. Do I follow him for his sake alone? This is the journey of holiness. Or do I follow him for his sake but also in order to gain some personal advantage?”.

Pope Francis concluded: “Let us ask the Lord for the grace of sending us the Holy Spirit so that we might follow him with a right intention: for him alone, without vanity, without the desire for power, without the desire for money”.