



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

What is a bishop's joy?

Monday, 3 November 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 45, 7 November 2014)

“A bishop’s feelings” or “a bishop’s joy”. Pope Francis himself provided the ideal title for the passage from the reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Philippians (2:1-4) on Monday, 3 November. He also warned about the rivalry and conceit that undermine the life of the Church, where it is instead necessary to treasure the directions given by Jesus and Paul: not to seek one’s own interests but to humbly serve others while asking for nothing in return. This was the theme of the Holy Father’s morning Mass at Santa Marta.

Paul develops this practical advice, the Pontiff explained, in a text which shows “his feelings toward the Philippians: perhaps the Church of the Philippians was the one he loved the most”. And “he begins as if asking a favour”. Indeed, he writes: “if there is any encouragement, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy”, in other words, “if you are this way, do me this favour: complete my joy”.

Thus, Paul specifically asks the Philippians to “complete the bishop’s joy”. And “what is the joy of a bishop? What is the joy that Paul asks of the Church of the Philippians?”. The answer is “to have the same feeling with the same love, being in unanimous agreement”. See, “Paul, as a pastor, knows that this is the path of Jesus. And also that this is the grace that Jesus, in prayer after the

Last Supper, asked of the Father: unity, harmony; that the disciples would remain unanimous in agreement with the same love and the same feeling, that is, the harmony of the Church”.

“We all know”, Francis explained, “that this harmony is a grace: the Holy Spirit creates it, but we must, for our part, do everything to help the Holy Spirit in order to build this harmony in the Church”; and also “in order to help understand what He asks of the Church”. The Spirit, in fact, “gives advice, so to speak, in a negative way, that is: ‘don’t do this, don’t do that!’”. And “what mustn’t the Philippians do?”. According to Paul: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit”. This is how, Pope Francis noted, “we can see that this isn’t only something of our time”, but “it comes from long ago”.

Thus Paul recommends not to do anything out of “rivalry”, and “not to fight against one another”, or even to show off, in order to give the air of being better than others”. The Bishop of Rome noted further that so often “in our institutions, in the Church, in the parishes, for example, in the colleges, we find rivalry, showing off, conceit”. It is like “two worms eating away at the consistency of the Church, making her weak: rivalry and conceit work against this harmony, this concordance”.

To avoid falling into these temptations, “what does Paul advise?”. He writes to the Philippians: “Each of you, in all humility — what must you do in humility? — consider others superior to yourself”. Paul “feels this”, such that “he qualifies himself unworthy to be called an apostle”. He defines himself “the least” and thus “he also forcefully humbles himself”. This is “his feeling: thinking that others are superior to him”.

Along the same line, Francis recalled the testimony of St Martino de Porres, a humble Peruvian Dominican Brother, whose liturgical memorial falls on 3 November. “His spirituality was in service because he felt that all others, even the worst sinners, were superior to him. He truly felt this”. What’s more, “he lived this way” and with such “humility” in a time very close to our own.

Thus, the Pope indicated “a bishop’s joy is this unity of the Church: humility without rivalry or conceit”. And Paul then continues: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”. It is thus necessary “to seek good” for others, “to serve others”. Because “this is the joy of a bishop when he sees his Church like this: the same feeling, the same love, being in unanimous agreement”. And “this is the air that Jesus wants in the Church. We can have different opinions, okay! But always in this air, this atmosphere of humility, love, without scorning anyone”.

Paul’s clear recommendation is “not to seek your own interest” alone, but “also that of others”. Therefore, he exhorts us not to “try to take advantage for ourselves”, looking out exclusively for our own interests. And, Francis said, “it is terrible when, in institutions of the Church, of a diocese, we find in parishes people who seek their own interests, not service, not love”. And Jesus, too, “tells us in the Gospel: do not seek your own interests, do not go down the path of even exchange,

of quid pro quo". In other words, don't say: "Yes, I did you this favour, so you do this for me". Jesus recalls this in the Gospel of Luke (14:12-14) with the parable that tells of the dinner invitation to "those who are unable to repay: this is gratuity".

"When in a Church", the Pontiff highlighted, "there is harmony, there is unity, we don't seek our own interests, this is the attitude of gratuity". This way "I do good", I don't "bargain with good". There is also, on the other hand, a "tendency toward utilitarianism"; however, "the love which Paul asks for rejects utilitarianism: do good, humble toward others who in your heart you consider better than you".

Francis recommended that we think throughout the day about "what my parish is like" or "what my community is like". And to ask ourselves whether these organizations and all of our institutions have "this spirit of feeling love, of unanimity, of harmony, without rivalry or conceit". Do they exist "with humility" and do we "think that others are superior to us?". Is "this spirit" truly there or is there perhaps "something to improve?". So, he said, it's good to ask ourselves "today, how can I improve this?". And to follow St Paul's advice, "in order that the bishop's joy may be complete; in order that Jesus' joy may be complete".