



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Two coats of paint

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“Worldly Christians, Christians in name, with two or three Christian attributes, but nothing more” are “pagans with two coats of paint”. They seem to be Christians when we cross paths with them at Mass each Sunday; in reality they have slid gradually into the temptation of “mediocrity”, such that they look “with pride and arrogance” at earthly things but not “at the Cross of Christ”. And it is this temptation that the Pope warned about at morning Mass on Friday in the chapel at Santa Marta.

For his meditation, Francis recalled a passage from the Letter of Paul to the Philippians (3:17-4:1), “his most beloved disciples”, in which the Apostle calls them “my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown”. And he exhorts them to “imitate some but do not imitate others”, in other words he advises them “to watch those who behave according to the example you have in us: imitate these, the Christians who go forth in a life of faith, in a life of service, in the Church. But do not imitate the others!”.

It is easily understood from the text, the Pope explained, that Paul had already spoken of this problem on various other occasions, because he adds: “I have often told you and now, with tears in my eyes, I’ll repeat it. Many live as enemies of the Cross of Christ. Imitate these people, but not those people!”. Yet, the Pontiff continued, “both groups were in the Church; all went together to

Sunday Mass, they praised the Lord, they called themselves Christians and baptized their children". So, "what was the difference?".

Paul's recommendation to the Philippians is clear in this regard: "Do not even look at them! Why? Because they behave as enemies of the Cross of Christ! Christian enemies of the Cross of Christ!". In fact, the Letter reads: "they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things".

In essence, Francis explained, they are "worldly Christians, Christians in name, with two or three Christian attributes, but nothing more". They are "pagan Christians". They have "a Christian name, but a pagan life" or, to put it another way, "pagans painted with two coats of Christianity: thus they appear as Christians, but they are pagans". The Pope specified that "these people, our brothers", were not only in Paul's time. Today too, he advised, "there are many of them". This is why we "have to be careful not to slide toward that path of pagan Christians, Christians in appearance". In reality, "the temptation to adapt to mediocrity — the mediocrity of these Christians — is actually their downfall, because the heart cools, it becomes lukewarm". But "the Lord speaks a strong word to the lukewarm: 'because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth'". These people, the Pontiff repeated, "are enemies of the Cross of Christ: they take the name, but don't follow the requirements of Christian life".

Further examining the concept, "Paul explains this a bit and speaks about 'citizenship'", underscoring that "our commonwealth is in heaven". However, the Apostle indicates, the citizenship of the enemies of the Cross is exclusively "earthly: they are citizens of the world, not of Heaven". And their "surname is 'worldly'". This is why Paul strongly advises: "Look out for them!".

Precisely because it is not an issue confined to the Philippians of Paul's time, the Pope proposed a series of practical questions to ask ourselves, for an examination of conscience: "At this point each of us — even me! — should ask ourselves: Do I have any of this? Do I have any worldliness in me? Something pagan? Do I like to boast? Do I like money? Do I like pride, arrogance? Where are my roots, that is, where is my citizenship? In Heaven or on earth?". Do we belong to the earthly or the spiritual world? Indeed, Pope Francis explained, again quoting St Paul, "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ". And that of the enemies of the Cross? The Apostle responds that "in the end their kind will meet with destruction". Thus, the Pontiff emphasized, "these painted Christians will meet a bad end".

It's important, the Pope continued, to look toward the end in order to see "where that citizenship that you have in your heart leads you": "worldly citizenship" leads "to ruin", whereas "that of the Cross of Christ" leads "to the encounter with Him", which is "so beautiful".

How do you realize that you are sliding toward worldliness, toward worldly citizenship? Francis highlighted that this is "a process that is done among us". It is "a temptation: one slides toward worldliness". The signs to understand what we are moving toward, the Pope said, "are in your

heart: if you love and are attached to money, to vanity and pride, you are on that bad path; if you seek to love God, to serve others, if you are gentle, if you are humble, if you serve others, you are on the good path". And thus, "your identity card is good: it's from Heaven". The other, however, is "a citizenship that will bring you harm".

And Jesus beseeched the Father to save his disciples "from the spirit of the world, from this worldliness, which leads to destruction". Then, in the Letter to the Philippians, "Paul speaks of transfiguration". He writes: "Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body". And thus, those "who go on the path of Jesus, in humility, in gentleness and in service to others, in prayer, in adoration, will be transformed in glory. But the others will also change". Paul "is clear" about this when he states: "Look out for the spirit of worldliness". Because, the Pope continued, "it begins with little, but it goes slowly and is a journey that is made without tiring".

It is like the day's Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (16:1-8), which speaks of the steward. Francis asked, "How did the steward get to the point of defrauding, stealing from his Lord? How did it happen", all in one day? "No! Bit by bit". Perhaps by "a tip here one day, a bribe there another day, and thus corruption comes little by little". For "the path of the worldliness of these enemies of the Cross of Christ is like this, it leads you to corruption!". And then you "end up like this man, openly stealing".

Hence "Paul's advice" to the Philippians: "stand firm in the Lord according to the example I have given you; and do not allow your heart and soul to weaken and end up in nothingness, in corruption". This, the Pope concluded, "is a beautiful grace to ask for: to stand firm in the Lord: all of salvation is there, the glorious transfiguration will be there. Everything will be!". Thus, he reiterated, the grace to ask for today is that of standing "firm in the Lord and in the example of the Cross of Christ: humility, poverty, gentleness, service to others, adoration, prayer".