



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Sinful Christians

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(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 46, 14 November 2014)

“Sin, forgiveness and faith” are three closely linked words that the Pope put forth during Mass on Monday morning in the chapel of Casa Santa Marta. He extracted them from a passage of the Gospel according to Luke (17:1-6), which speaks of these three very things. They “are three words of Jesus”, Pope Francis pointed out, and “perhaps they weren’t spoken together, at the same time, but the evangelist puts them together”. And thus began the Pontiff’s reflection.

The first of the three terms underscored by the Pope is “sin”. “To me”, he confided, “it is striking how Jesus concludes” his discourse: after speaking about sin he says: “Take heed to yourselves”. Thus, he uses a “harsh” expression, asking them “not to sin”. Luke writes that it is Jesus himself who says: “temptations to sin are sure to come”; but he also adds: “woe to him by whom they come!”. And more precisely: “woe to him who should cause one of these little ones, the People of God, to sin; the weak in faith, children, young people, the elderly who have lived a life of faith, woe to him who causes them to sin! It would be better to die!”.

Jesus also addresses these particularly “harsh” words “to us, to Christians”, and as a result “we have to ask ourselves: Do I sin?”. And even before that, “what is sin?”. The Pope explained that sin “is to assert and profess a way of life — ‘I’m a Christian’ — and then to live as a pagan who

believes in nothing”. And “this amounts to sin because it lacks testimony: faith confessed is life lived”.

Along this line of reasoning Francis turned to the First Reading, taken from the Letter of Paul to Titus (1:1-9), highlighting that “Paul is writing to his disciple, Bishop Titus, and advises him how priests, bishops, as God’s stewards, should behave”. And “he gives other advice: that the priest — whether a priest or bishop — be blameless; not be arrogant, not look down on everyone; not be quick-tempered, but be meek, not a drunkard, spiritual not irreverent; that he not be violent but peaceful; not greedy for gain, not attached to money, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, upright, just, holy, self-controlled, holding firm to the sure word as taught”. For “when a priest — whether a priest or bishop — does not live like this, he sins, he causes scandal”. And one is led to point out to him: “You, teacher, tell us one thing but do another!”. And about this the Pope stated: “The sins of priests do such harm to the People of God, so much harm! The Church suffers so much because of this!”.

These words are about priests but they also apply “to all Christians”. It does not become “permissible to be arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard” simply by the fact that one isn’t a priest. The words, therefore, are “for everyone”, the Pontiff remarked. One must realize that “when Christian men or women, who go to Church, who go to a parish, do not live this way, they sin”.

After all, Francis continued, we often hear “I don’t go to Church because it’s better to be honest and stay home” than to be like those “who go to Church and then do this, this and that...”. Thus we can see that “sin destroys, it destroys faith”. And “this is why Jesus is so harsh” and repeats: “Take heed of yourselves, be careful!”. This very exhortation of Jesus “will do us good to repeat today: Take heed of yourselves!”. For “we are all capable of sinning”.

The second word that Luke offers is “forgiveness”. In the Gospel, Jesus “speaks about forgiveness, and he advises us to never tire of forgiving: always forgive. Why? Because I have been forgiven”. Indeed, “the first one forgiven in my life was me. And for this reason I have no right not to forgive: I am required, because of the forgiveness that I received, to forgive others”. Thus, “forgive: one time, two, three, seventy times seven, always! Even in the same day!”. And here, the Pontiff clarified, Jesus “exaggerates in order to help us understand the importance of forgiveness”. Because “a Christian, who is incapable of forgiving, sins: he isn’t a Christian”. This is why He tells them, “to frighten them a bit: if you cannot forgive, neither can you receive God’s forgiveness”. In other words, we “must forgive” because we have been “forgiven”.

This truth “is in the *Our Father*. Jesus taught it there”, the Pope recalled. Of course, he acknowledged, the subject of forgiveness “isn’t understood in human logic”. In fact, “human logic leads you not to forgive, to revenge; it leads you to hatred, to divisiveness”. And thus we see “so many families divided” because they lack forgiveness, “so many families! Children distant from parents; a husband and wife drifted apart...”. For this reason, “it is so important to think this: if I

don't forgive, I don't have — it seems I won't have — the right to be forgiven, or I don't understand what it means that the Lord has forgiven me”.

Of course, the Pope stated, it's understandable why, on “hearing these things, the disciples said to the Lord: ‘Increase our faith!’”. Indeed, “without faith one cannot live without sinning and always forgiving”. We truly need the “light of faith, that faith which we have received, the faith of a merciful Father, of a Son who gave his life for us, a Spirit who is inside us and helps us grow, the faith in the Church, the faith in the baptized and holy People of God”. And “this is a gift: faith is a gift”. No one, Francis said, receives faith from books or by “going to conferences”. After all, precisely because “faith is a gift of God who comes to you, the Apostles said to Jesus: ‘Increase our faith!’”.

The Pontiff concluded by suggesting an earnest reflection on “these three words: sin, forgiveness and faith”. Regarding sin, he recapped, it's enough to remember “only those words of Jesus: ‘Take heed to yourselves! This is dangerous’: better “to be cast into the sea” than to sin. Regarding forgiveness then, the Pope invited us to always remember that we were forgiven first. And last, the aspect of faith, without which he repeated, “a life without sin and a life of forgiveness” could never be possible.